

Fostering Student Engagement in a Residential College Setting

by

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## ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities have continued to refine their understanding of engagement, affinity, and retention. At Arizona State University (ASU), the goal has been to continually retain first-year students at a 90%+ retention rate. At ASU, two key aspects of the first-year experience have been employed to foster retention. First, ASU has grouped on-campus students so they lived in residential colleges, housing students with others in the same college, to aid retention of first-year students. Second, ASU has required first-year students to take a 101 class, an orientation to ASU resources (library, advising, etc.) and its community (student organizations, clubs, etc.). The residential college living experience has afforded students opportunities to intentionally engage in campus events, connect with other students, and develop a vision for success. The 101 class has provided students with opportunities to learn about resources and community that have enriched their first-year experiences. Together, these two key approaches have offered students pathways to building initial engagement at the institution. The current research study was conducted to examine the ways in which students became engaged during their initial semester at ASU. Student participants in this study all lived in the W. P. Carey (WPC) Residential College Community in Hassayampa Academic Village (HAV) and were enrolled in WPC 101—Student Success in Business. WPC 101 was focused on helping students navigate college and learn about campus resources.

In the study, the researcher infused three Engagement Workshops into the WPC 101 curriculum alongside pre-existing assignments to afford students learning opportunities for a richer, deeper exploration and reflection on their first-semester

experience. Students participated in a pre- and post-intervention survey, contributed written narratives and reflections, and six students completed individual interviews.

Results of the study, particularly the qualitative results, indicated (a) quality of relationships, (b) ASU community, and (c) campus environment emerged as variables that served as the ‘roots of engagement’ for these first-semester students. Thus, the current work extended previous research on engagement by identifying the initial developmental aspects of engagement among first-semester, university students. The discussion included detailed explanations of the results, limitations, implications for research and practice, lessons learned, and conclusions.

## DEDICATION

There are many people to whom I dedicate this dissertation. I dedicate this dissertation to the students. You are the reason for my work as a student affairs professional. Your insight provided a rich narrative to which I was honored to have been a part of. Thank you for the valuable insight into how we can continue to create intentional experiences where we can assist students in become even more successful.

I dedicate this dissertation to the hundreds of hours our ASU University Housing Residential Life staff play in engaging, connecting and developing our students. They are some of the hardest working professionals at ASU, your dedication continues to inspire me. Thank you to the W. P. Carey partners who continually believe in providing intentional experiences to our students. Thank you to Dr. Michele Pfund for the one conversation we had many years ago about retention heat mapping which would turn into my dissertation topic. I would like to mention Jacob Sparks, Kaylee McAllister, Lorena Cabrera, Kelly Schiess, Mark Flores, Michaela Marsh and Caysee Bellman for serving as my staff during my dissertation process.

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## CHAPTER 1

### LARGER AND LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Each year colleges and universities across the country have welcomed thousands of students into their collegiate environment and campus cultures. College housing departments rushed to ensure residential facilities were prepared to receive these students and create a positive experience while they were living on campus. Living on campus has become a cultural norm and a recognized tradition of most college and university communities. Campus housing just like other departments has been required to show its relevance and value by how they were contributing to students' retention, engagement, and affinity with respect to the institution (Pascarella, Terenzini & Blimling, 1994; Tinto, 1977).

On-campus housing facilities have offered more than just places where students slept and ate. Residential halls have served as living laboratories that created an intentional learning environment. In this current time of rising costs of college education, institutions of higher education have been compelled to demonstrate the worth of academic programs and student services. The results of such scrutiny have fostered movements to create on-campus communities that focused on student interests (social, programmatic, leadership, etc.) and academic endeavors. Investing in intentional structuring of residential educational experiences centered on the academic and social engagement of students has become critical to the success of higher education institutions.

Taken together, these demands suggested the following question for those in residence life who were involved in developing and implementing programs for students:

What is the future direction for creating intentional connections between students and the collegiate environment? In brief, the answer has been student developing student engagement in which university staff work collaboratively with students to build various kinds of connections to the university to foster student retention and persistence to graduation. Over the last two decades, campus-housing philosophies have been focused on creating learning communities. *Learning communities* have been viewed as on-campus residential communities that have integrated students' social and academic development within the residence hall environment (Grills, Fingerhut, Thandai, & Machon, 2012).

Development of unique components of learning communities has allowed housing and residence life departments to collaborate in order to support students' academic and social development. They have achieved such outcomes by creating intentional learning opportunities outside the classroom within the living-learning residential environment. The development of these learning communities has required intentional resource allocation, appropriate student staffing, and alignment of efforts related to student engagement. Further, learning communities have fostered university connections, personal development among students, and a social environment in which students have shared common interests whether those were academic or theme-based, residential emphases such as wellness, technology, substance-free, and so on.

Student engagement in the residence halls has assisted with the development of an overall sense of community and individual student success. Living on campus has afforded students opportunities to learn from diverse peers and to create shared learning experiences. Students who have engaged in residential learning communities have

broadened their experiences, and acquired skills and experiences that have supported students' development of 'ownership' of their collegiate experiences. Because of the importance of student engagement, it has served as a critical indicator by which colleges and universities gauge their success (Tinto, 2001).

One of the major driving questions for learning communities has been: How do learning communities contribute to the retention of students at the university? Housing and residence life departments have been asked to intentionally partner with academic units and other campus student service units to provide on-site campus support to students living in the residence halls. This intentional merging of functions across academic and student affairs departments provided for greater resource sharing and opportunities for students to engage and build a stronger affinity and connection to their university. Students who become more engaged in their residential and collegiate environment have been retained at higher rates than those students who have chosen to engage less fully in their environments (Jessup-Anger, 2012).

Over the last 10 years, learning communities have continued to change and bring together student affairs and academic affairs personnel in new and varied ways to create a shared strategic vision of student development for those living in residence halls. This movement has led to the development of a Residential College (RC) model (O'Hara, 2001). The RC model has afforded student affairs and academic affairs practitioners opportunities to create shared spaces for the exchange of ideas to foster student development within residential living situations. As a result, RC have provided for high levels of individual and group student engagement opportunities. This critical

partnership has aided in meeting the needs of academic colleges and housing departments.

Nevertheless, despite fostering greater levels of student engagement, housing programs have had difficulties with respect to determining how their efforts contributed to the overall retention of students at the university and with regard to students' persistence to graduation. Generally, metrics used to assess success of residential programs on the retention of students has been assessed using satisfaction surveys (Li, McCoy, Shelley, & Whalen, 2010). Although, student satisfaction has been a primary indicator of student retention, focusing on satisfaction has not taken into account the role of skill learning and individual development that occur among students as they attend the university and how these might contribute to retention. Moreover, satisfaction surveys by nature tend to be quantitative (Berger, 1997), which has precluded in-depth assessment of students' beliefs about how living on campus has helped or hindered them with respect to living, learning, and growing and those connections to retention. Currently, RC housing programs are well situated with respect to supporting student retention because they can provide intentionally focused, quality engagement opportunities that afford students occasions to engage, connect, and develop affinity for the institution while growing in their personal and academic skills.

Residential life programming at Arizona State University (ASU) has gathered students living on campus into one of many RC communities. The RC model has been established as a direct response to the demographic changes in the student body and their needs. ASU has continued to be a leader in innovation and learning and has used the RC model to support students in smaller communities where students have the ability to

thrive (J. Rund, personal community, October 25, 2016). On-campus residents have the opportunity to engage, connect, and develop with others from different ethnic groups, religions, and so on while they share common interests associated with their areas of academic study. The RC model has been embedded into the first-year students' experiences and has become a normative component of the overall student experience.

### **Local Context**

I have been a student affairs practitioner for eight years. During that time, I have worked in variety of university settings and have experienced many different approaches to developing student engagement. My career as a practitioner began as a student at a small, private, Methodist-affiliated institution in the south. By being at a small, private institution, I was afforded many opportunities to become engaged and involved at the institution. As a student leader, I was able to connect with and build deeper relationships with peers, faculty members, and student affairs staff members. Because of the guidance and support of my peers and staff members, I was able to take on different student leadership opportunities, which included serving as a two-term student body president. In this leadership role, I had the opportunity to listen to and reflect on the positive and challenging engagement experiences of my peers. Through my experiences in student engagement as an undergraduate, I elected to follow my current career path as a student affairs practitioner who has been concerned with helping other students discover their personal narratives with respect to engagement.

Student engagement has been influenced by a set of numerous choices about activities, in which students participate along with a set of skills and interests that affect engagement. Colleges and universities offer a variety of student organization



opportunities for engagement on the on-campus. Moreover, other on-campus living experiences offer unique opportunities for student engagement. Additionally, on-campus residential facilities feature student leaders who have been trained to assist students with building their own collegiate experiences. Residential students have been provided with on-campus opportunities to engage in many different organizations that have been featured in meetings occurring in their residence halls. Thus, structuring student engagement in residential hall has been a key to retention and persistence of first-year students towards reenrollment and persistence to graduation (Pascarella, Terenzini & Blimling, 1994).

Arizona State University is one of the nation's largest public institutions, with an enrollment of over 100,000 students across four campus locations—Tempe, West, Polytechnic, and Downtown Phoenix and on-line distance education (ASU Fast Facts, 2018). Over the past five years, Residential Life at ASU has charted a path of intentional student development including engaging, connecting, and developing students who live on campus.

Within the last five years, Housing at ASU has moved from having living-learning programs/communities into a RC model. This change was due to the growing number of students entering the university and President Crow's vision of growing ASU to 100,000 students enrolled by 2020 (ASU Fast Facts, 2017). RCs have been established through strategic partnerships between housing units and academic colleges/disciplines. These partnerships allowed for an intentional focus on how students were engaging within their environments, connecting to campus resources and communities, and developing the skills to be successful. Retention and persistence have been viewed as

important metrics at ASU and the work carried out by the RCs was seen as the predominant pathway to assist students in making their connections to the university community. In particular, assessment results for the RC model at ASU have continued to show high levels of approval among students concerning their levels of satisfaction with facilities, programs, and staff, as evidenced by the W. P. Carey RC student satisfaction survey, students completed during the spring of 2016 semester (WPC Student Engagement Survey, 2016). This survey gathered responses from 245 students living within the WPC RC community. Because RCs were associated with different academic colleges, ASU RCs has developed different structures and approaches with respect to retention practices unique to that academic college. The W. P. Carey RC has been and continues to be the largest RC at ASU with about 2,000 residential students on the Tempe campus. The W. P. Carey School of Business has continued to show substantial increases in first-year student enrollment with a projected growth of about 3.5% each year until the year 2020 (WPC FTF Student Retention Report, 2016). Results from the survey showed 76% of residents reported they “enjoyed their residential” experience while living in the RC community. In addition, 95% of participants identified one to two skills they learned because they lived in the RC setting (WPC Student Engagement Survey, 2016). Nevertheless, the results that focused on satisfaction did not confirm whether students intended to continue their academic careers at ASU. Additionally, the data provided information about the programmatic efforts completed by student, staff members. Nevertheless, the data did not reflect students’ levels of engagement, connection, and development that had occurred due to the programming in the residential

setting. In this respect, satisfaction clearly did not provide the full picture of how students were actually building affinity for ASU and being retained at the university.

Engaging students while they live on-campus has been viewed as being the key to ensuring students participate in a comprehensive engagement model focused on developing affinity for the W. P. Carey School of Business and ASU. This student engagement will take varying forms based on the strategic priorities established each year. The majority of student engagement and retention practices have had their roots in the satisfaction surveys that have served as a proxy measure of retention. Yet, student satisfaction by itself has failed to provide a richer understanding of retention; one that has the potential to be enhanced by considering students' narratives of their engagements. Thus, satisfaction data have been limited in the sense they have not provided rich explanations of student engagement, connections to the institution, and development of social and academic skills and their respective influences on retention and persistence to graduation.

### **Student Engagement in the W. P. Carey Residential College Community**

The focus of this project is to examine how fostering student engagement has contributed to students' engagement and their retention at ASU. Specifically, this study will focus on first-time, on-campus, first year students who are enrolled in the W. P. Carey School of Business and who live in the W. P. Carey RC. The study will examine how students become engaged, why they choose to do so, and how engagement influences retention. Additionally, I will examine how living in the RC community assists students with becoming engaged.

To foster student engagement and build connections to the university, college residence halls have attempted to create a unique social-psychological environment for students, which supports their development as young adults. In addition to 2,000 students, the W. P. Carey RC was comprised of 104 student leaders (community assistants and residential engagement leaders), and 9 masters-level professionals who worked directly with the students in that community. The latter group was the WPC Student Engagement Team and it directed the vision and implementation of engagement efforts for the WPC RC community.

Within the WPC RC community, student engagement has been focused most clearly on the social engagement of students living on campus. For each residential floor community, there were two to five student-leader, staff members who were hired and trained by the WPC Student Engagement Team. These student-leader, staff members work with students on their floors to build engagement and connection events focused on the social connection to the institution, which build affinity for ASU and the W. P. Carey School of Business.

Engagement efforts were aimed at all students living in the WPC RC community. Nevertheless, the engagement of out-of-state students has become an increasing priority for the staff. Including international students, all ‘out-of-state’ students comprised approximately 40% of the overall residential population in this RC. Retention of out-of-state students was lower than those who were Arizona residents (Michele Pfund, personal communication 2016).

As a complement to the WPC RC community, incoming W. P. Carey students are required to take WPC101—Student Success in Business (hereafter WPC 101) during

their first-year of residence at ASU. WPC101 has been established as a 1-credit course, which has been offered over the full 16-weeks of the fall and spring semesters. Each week students learned a different set of skills with respect to student success in order to navigate their WPC student experience. Based on data, students who have not performed well on assignments in WPC 101 also may have had other academic-related issues in other classes. WPC 101 has offered students opportunities to begin reflecting on their ASU Sun Devil experience through intentional writing assignments and activities.

### **Research Questions**

Taken together, the contextual information about (a) the WPC RC community, (b) the need to improve retention, (c) efforts to foster student engagement, and (d) related efforts including WPC 101 suggest that additional efforts with respect to fostering student engagement are warranted. Thus, an intervention will be implemented to foster greater engagement of first-year, WPC RC students. To determine the effectiveness of the intervention and its influence on students, the following research questions have been developed to guide and direct the study.

1. How and to what extent does participation in the Engagement Workshops foster student engagement?
2. How and to what extent does participation in Engagement Workshops influence students' self-efficacy, attitudes, and connections to ASU and their intentions to re-enroll at ASU for the next, spring 2019 semester?
3. How does participation in the Engagement Workshops influence students' narratives around engagement?

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

In this chapter, I have provided information about theoretical perspectives, related literature, and research that has guided the project. After an initial overview, I have reviewed literature related to the engagement of students in residential colleges (RCs). Additionally, I have reviewed several theoretical perspectives that were instrumental in guiding the project.

#### **Overview**

Among the priorities for any college or university was the retention of students to persist towards graduation. Colleges and universities have offered a wide array of academic and student support services that assist students to develop deeper connections to the collegiate community aimed at supporting such persistence. Further, Tinto (1977, 1993) suggested students who were integrated into the university setting were more likely to continue with their university studies. Thus, campus-housing departments house students *and* they provide intentional centers for engagement, connection, and development. Students who live on campus were more likely to be retained and graduated at higher rates than their peers who lived off campus (Pascarella et al., 1994). The on-campus, residential experience provided an intentional connection to peers, campus resources, faculty, and the broader university community. The on-campus experience allowed students to be exposed to diverse individuals and ideas that assisted in expanding students' knowledge of the world and society (Grills et al., 2012; Jessup-Anger, 2012; LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007). As a result, on-campus residential

spaces have served as living laboratories that fostered the intentional engagement, connection, and development of students.

Residential students have been afforded unique opportunities to interact using intentional connection points to engage students in more meaningful experiences within their residential environments. Such opportunities allowed students to form a closer connection to the university. For example, one aspect of student engagement in the residential halls has focused on programmatic efforts to increase the social connection of students to one another. Thus, residential life programs have been uniquely positioned to foster retention of students in the collegiate setting.

To understand how students were engaging with their residential setting, a number of theories and frameworks have been proposed with respect to understanding student engagement. For this study, I have used the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991, n.d., Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) as the framework to understand student engagement and connection to the university. Additionally, I have drawn upon the work on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2005), Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter-Magola, 2001) and the Theory of Student Persistence and Retention (Tinto, 1977, 1991). The former two frameworks provided ways to understand student intentions and narrative development, which were useful in clarifying how students' engaging in their residential community lead to other behaviors such as retention and persistence.

### **Learning Communities**

Over the last two decades, learning communities have been employed as an approach to support new students living in on-campus, university housing. Learning communities were constructed as intentional living settings, which integrated students'

social *and* academic development within the residence hall environment (Grills et al., 2012). Students living on campus have been exposed to learning and growing skills associated with life-long learning and development (Jessup-Anger, 2012). Housing and residence life departments have been uniquely situated to meet these needs. Learning communities have taken on various forms and structures depending on the university culture and trends of on-campus housing. For instance, *living-learning communities* (LLCs) were established as special interest or academic themed communities into which on-campus residents were intentionally placed. LLCs were smaller in scope and tended to have about 30-60 students living within the communities making them a special interest community (Li et al., 2005).

By comparison, *living-learning programs* (LLPs) have been developed as residential housing programs that incorporated academic-based themes and built community through common learning. The primary difference between LLCs and LLPs was the intentional academic connection. For LLCs, academic integration was generally not a goal. On the other hand, LLPs have had a more direct connection to academic programs because academic focused activities were integrated more fully into the living space. These distinctions have been important for RCs. RCs have tended to have a direct link to academic programs with an intentional focus on how to integrate faculty members into the community and an intentional focus on programmatic efforts for building students' skills and knowledge in the academic area. As a result, RCs generally have included strategic partnerships between the academic colleges and housing departments (Jessup-Anger, 2012; O'Hara, 2001).



Research on learning communities has primarily been focused on students' satisfaction with the physical space, amenities, social connections, and resources allocated and provided to students (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002; Li et al., 2005). Much of this research has been limited to assessing environmental cues with regard to a safe and secure environment conducive to learning.

RCs have provided a deliberate way for large research universities to create smaller sized communities with an intentional academic focus (Jessup-Anger, 2012). Notably, RCs allowed for direct involvement of academic affairs staff in students living experiences. The intentional partnership between student and academic affairs units produced a shared responsibility for student development. The RC approach required development and implementation of a shared vision and goals for students in the residential community.

### **ASU Residential College Model and Related Research**

At ASU, use of the RC model has provided for an intentional focus on student engagement. Because the students and student leaders in the RCs were from the same college, programmatic efforts were focused around matters appropriate to students from an academic college. For example, student staff and leaders provided knowledge from their prior experiences living in the community to first-year students. Through these efforts, first-year students were able to make more connections in and outside the classroom, which became important as students developed a sense of belonging during their collegiate experiences (Pascarella et al., 1994; Tinto, 1993). Because students lived in shared spaces, on-campus residents were able to create new social networks and engagement experiences (Rodger & Johnson, 2005).

Additionally, tutoring centers have been placed into the residential environment so students have a central, physical location for academic support. Academic advisors were incorporated into the space to provide another layer of academic support. From a programmatic perspective, ASU has provided a substantial number of campus resources with respect to on-site support. The RC model provided a high level of accessibility to resources, which demonstrated ASU's commitment to students living on campus (Educational Outreach and Student Services, 2016).

ASU has conducted a First-Year Connections Survey (year) to assess the academic and social connections of all first-year students (hereafter, referred to as the Connections Survey). The Connections Survey was developed primarily to assess students' satisfaction and a few items assessed engagement. Two questions were dedicated to assessing intent to re-enroll at the institution. In some years, questions have centered on students' satisfaction with programmatic offerings and delivery. Although responses to the Connections Survey were used to identify students who were at-risk of leaving the institution, changing majors, etc. responses to the instrument did not provide an in-depth assessment about what assistance at-risk students needed from the university to help them become more successful. At the conclusion of the survey efforts, students who have been identified as being potentially at-risk for retention were scheduled to have individual meetings. During these meetings, staff members inquired about their ASU experiences. Further, the meetings served as opportunities to provide resources to these students and refer them for any additional support. Other than these individual conversations, not much has been done with the survey data other than to provide data about the number of student outreach efforts. Based on these data and efforts, it was not

clear how the more substantial goal to ensure students were connected with resources and others at ASU was attained.

Although students have been satisfied with their experiences, they may still choose not to stay at a particular college or university. Generally, student satisfaction has served as a predictor to student retention behaviors, but it was not clear why some students who were satisfied with their institutions chose to leave. Tinto (1977) indicated students chose to leave when students were not integrated into the institution in terms of academic and social perspectives.

**Implications based on the RC model.** From a student housing perspective, the assessment of student satisfaction with respect to facilities, policies, and programmatic endeavors (Li et al., 2005) is the primary focus of assessment of RCs. Nevertheless, such assessments miss the point because they fail to take account of engagements that result from participation in the RC experience. Engagements may be central to integration into the university, yet for the most part, they are not assessed in evaluations of students' satisfaction with RC experiences. Thus, assessing engagement and matters related to engagement may be essential to understanding students' connections to the institution and their subsequent retention and graduation. Moreover, students who are able to build their own experiences will attach their own meaning to those events. The RC model allows for sense and meaning making when students work at connecting the academic and social environments to the residential environment (Nash & Murray, 2009; Berger, 1997). Thus, a focus on assessing engagement can assist university staff in understanding students' deeper connections to the academic college and the university and assist in understanding their retention at the institution.

## Student Engagement

RCs have been uniquely positioned to build intentional student engagement efforts that provided various opportunities to shape students' experiences. The phrase 'student engagement' referred to how *involved* or *interested* students appeared to be in their learning and how *connected* they were to their classes, their institutions, and each other (Axelson & Flick, 2010). To understand better how students were becoming engaged in their collegiate environments, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, year) was developed. The NSSE assessed the extent to which students took part in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gained for their college experiences. The NSSE measured student behaviors highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes associated with college. Institutions administered the NSSE assessment to understand the needs of incoming students, which allowed institutions to benchmark their students' aggregated scores and compare them to similar institutions' scores. The NSSE definition of student engagement suggested engagement was largely a matter of behavior on the part of students, something students were observed doing (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Defining student engagement in the usual sense of the term has been challenging because many different factors were considered to influence students' engagement in their collegiate environments. Nevertheless, there was substantial agreement that both institutions and their students were central components with respect to engagement.

For the research project, I will be using the Kuh's (2003) definition of student engagement. Kuh defined student engagement as the time and energy students devoted to educationally purposeful activities and events. Further, he noted institutions intentionally

created opportunities and provided routes for students to participate in activities leading to student success. Kuh's definition suggested students were the central component around which engagement occurred. Thus, the more engaged and involved students were within their campus community the more likely they were to believe their place was within the university community and the more likely they were to be retained (Astin, 1984). Student engagement within the residential setting played a key role in how students viewed their affinity to the university, but assessment of engagement as noted previously has been limited.

Kuh's (2003) definition placed responsibility for engagement on both the institution *and* the students. Students' efforts in investing time and energy into educationally purposeful activities must be equally matched by institutional efforts to employ effective educational practices to motivate positive student behaviors. Student engagement placed learning as the center of the definition that allowed students to attain personal learning experiences in and outside the classroom (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Therefore, institutional environments were viewed as being essential in assisting students in becoming engaged and persisting in their college efforts.

Further, institutional environments were viewed as being essential in terms of helping students to become engaged by providing various opportunities for students to connect with their academic studies. Thus, student engagement has served as a predictor of student learning and academic achievement. Students who were involved in educationally productive activities in college were developing habits of the mind and heart that increased their capacity for continuous learning and personal development (Shulman, 2002).

Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) completed a study examining NSSE data in conjunction with student learning using Kuh's (2003) definition of student engagement. Carini and his colleagues used the 2006 and 2008 NSSE data, college GPAs, and standardized test scores from the participating institutions. The researchers explored the extent to which different forms of student engagement were linked to student performance. Specifically, Carini et al. examined forms of student engagement associated with learning as measured by the RAND tests, the new essay prompts on the Graduate Record Exam, and college GPA. To clarify the context, the RAND tests consisted of a series cognitive and performance tests. The critical thinking tasks of the RAND test included science, social science and arts, and humanities. Additionally, the RAND test included two essay prompts from the GRE (Carini et al., 2006). The key variables in the study were level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments.

The results of this study yielded relatively strong correlations between student engagement, which were linked to desirable student outcomes such as critical thinking and grades. The researchers found that student engagement was one facet of student success and academic achievement (Carini et al., 2006). Further, they found students who had lower SAT scores seemed to benefit more from student engagement as compared to those with higher SAT scores. When examining institutional characteristics, they concluded some institutions provided more educationally enriching opportunities for students to become more engaged in their environments.

**Implications based on student engagement.** Students create their own engagement experiences by choosing to participate in the programs, services, and organizations offered in on-campus residential settings. At ASU, there are close to 1,000 clubs and organizations in which individuals can participate. As they consider programs and organizations, collegiate undergraduate students want to build personal connections in their engagements to allow for meaning making (Nash & Murray, 2009).

The RC model at ASU provides for focused, intentional engagement by students because student leaders come from the same colleges and programs of the academic college. Nevertheless, surveys regarding first-year experiences have not taken account of understanding how students are engaging in the RC environment not how that engagement affects retention and persistence. If these kinds of data were available, it could inform development of a more comprehensive engagement model.

By examining how students become engaged in the collegiate environment, researchers can more effectively assess attitudes toward the institutions, social and academic integration of students, and may be able to predict more effectively, why students choose to persist. Thus, for example, examining the behavioral mechanisms and intentions with respect to engagement might provide clues about whether or how engagement, institutional affinity, and retention and persistence are related.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

Ajzen (1991, n.d.) developed a theory regarding the behavioral intent of individuals to commit to performing certain behaviors. See Figure 1 below.

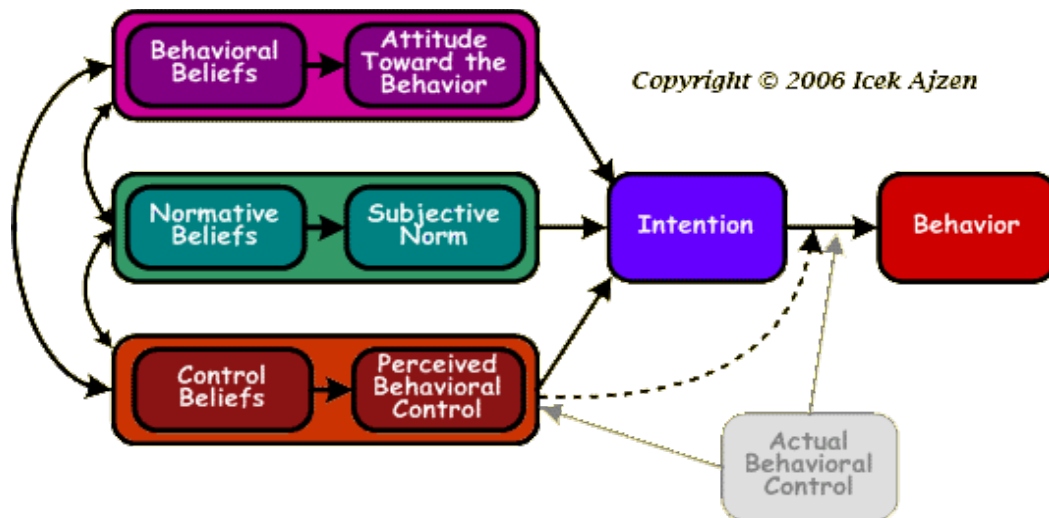


Figure 1. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior. Used by permission. Retrieved from <http://people.umass.edu/ajzen/tpb.diag.html>

The Theory of Planned behavior (TPB) was comprised of seven major constructs, three of which represented exogenous beliefs—behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs; three of which represented endogenous beliefs—attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control; and the seventh is intention to perform the behavior. Regarding exogenous beliefs these were beliefs to which a person subscribed and were based on the belief that the intended behavior would have a positive outcome that reinforced these beliefs or the converse. Behavioral beliefs "link[ed] the behavior of interest with expected outcomes" (Ajzen, n.d.). Normative beliefs were those that have been engrained in a person by important figures in their life time (teacher, spouse, mentor, advisor, etc.). Control beliefs were those factors based on experience that were likely to facilitate or impede the occurrence of certain behaviors.



Attitudes toward the behavior represented “the degree to which performance of the behavior is positively or negatively valued” Ajzen, n.d.). Subjective norms represented the social pressure to perform or not perform a certain behavior. Finally, perceived behavioral control was concerned with people’s perceptions about being able to complete certain behaviors.

Notably, perceived behavioral control was characterized by individuals’ direct choices about whether the behavior of interest would be difficult or easy to perform. Further, as individuals considered their perceived behavioral control over some matter, they were required to consider specific contexts; not just a general disposition. Intentions to engage in a behavior and perceptions of control must be assessed in relation to the particular behavior of interest, for example, intention to participate in university activities such as joining a club, and the specified context must be the same as that in which the behavior was to occur (Ajzen, 1991, n.d.; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

In sum, the TPB was centrally focused on how exogenous beliefs influenced endogenous variables, beliefs, such as attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and how those, in turn, influenced intentions to perform a behavior, and how intentions influenced the actual behavior. By understanding individuals’ intentions, predictions about behavior were possible. The Theory of Planned Behavior is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, 2010).

According to the TPB, three endogenous variables influenced intention to perform a behavior. These endogenous variables were: (a) attitudes toward the behavior, that is to say beliefs about the degree to which a behavior produced positive or negative outcomes;

(b) subjective norms, i.e., the social pressure to perform the behavior; and (c) perceived behavioral control, the perceptions about one's ability to perform the behavior).

Moreover, the endogenous variables were, in turn, influenced by exogenous beliefs including (a) behavioral beliefs that influenced attitudes toward a behavior; (b) normative beliefs that induced subjective norms; and (c) control beliefs, which influenced perceived behavioral control. Further, proponents of the theory posited that more positive attitudes, stronger subjective norms, and greater control beliefs resulted in a stronger behavioral intention. Finally, the theory suggested that an individual who held stronger intentions and who had the ability to do so was more likely to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991, n.d.).

**Implications based on the Theory of Planned Behavior.** Student engagement behaviors are rooted in their intentions as exemplified in the TPB (Ajzen, n.d.; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Moreover, intentions, are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which is a form of self-efficacy (see the discussion below). Thus, engagement in any collegiate environment is a choice; one that is influenced by the extent to which students view themselves as being capable to execute actions appropriate to the situation. Students are the drivers of their experiences and elect to participate in opportunities that seem meaningful to them. Thus, through the lens of intention, students build their experiential base by choosing to engage in various activities (Chambers & Chiang, 2012). As a result, student engagement opportunities must be consistent with their perceived ability to engage in them in an effective manner and are connected to the attitudes and values students hold.

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura (1997, p. 3) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.” Self-efficacy has been concerned with the perceptions of competency within an area such as academics, social interaction, and so on. Notably, self-efficacy has been shown to depend on past experiences, particularly those in which individuals have been successful (Bandura, 1977, 1997). As a result, self-efficacy beliefs have varied depending on experience, motivation, and contextual factors. For example, judgments about self-efficacy involve a careful weighing of task and contextual factors against the competencies individuals possess to accomplish a given task within the contextual setting.

Bandura (1977, 1997) suggested there were four sources of efficacy information that influenced self-efficacy. The four sources were mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional responses. These four sources of efficacy were instrumental in the development self-efficacy with respect to individuals’ assessments of their abilities to complete a task.

Mastery experiences have been the most prominent source of self-efficacy and included previous successes with the task in question. Thus, success breeds further success because self-efficacy has increased the belief of continuing accomplishment in the future. For example, successes in doing an academic task or in meeting new people has provided individuals with greater self-efficacy for being able to accomplish those tasks in the future. Vicarious experiences, the second source of self-efficacy, has been derived from situations in which individuals have observed others perform a task. Because they consider themselves to be similar to the model who demonstrated the

behavior, they feel they can also execute the task/behavior. Thus, observing other who are similar to them succeed, suggested they will also succeed.

Verbal persuasion has influenced self-efficacy in the following way. When influential people like college instructors, trusted advisors, or someone else have suggested we can succeed at a task, self-efficacy has been increased. Finally, emotional and physiological states have been shown to influence self-efficacy. For example, people's moods and states such as stress and elation have affected their self-efficacy.

Taken together the four sources of self-efficacy have served as powerful influences individuals' ability to complete certain tasks. Notably, self-efficacy has been shown to be related to persistence in the presence of obstacles (Bandura, 1977; 1997). Specifically, those with higher levels of self-efficacy have demonstrated greater persistence in the face of obstacles than those with lower self-efficacy.

In collegiate settings, self-efficacy has primarily been used to understand students' abilities to achieve academically. Additionally, self-efficacy has been used in conjunction with student satisfaction to predict retention and persistence at an institution (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002). Self-efficacy has been used as a powerful tool to assist with predicting student success and how students construct meaning in their collegiate experiences (Berger, 1997).

DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) assessed self-efficacy in college students as it was related to purpose in life. More importantly, in the current context, DeWitz et al. also examined how self-efficacy was used as a retention metric. From the retention perspective, the researchers examined student characteristics that affected their transition into the collegiate setting including such variables as high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores,

family support, coping strategies, and so on. For purpose of life, the authors used the *Frankl Construct of Purpose in Life*. Results showed there was a relation between purpose in life scores and self-efficacy scores.

DeWitz and Walsh (2002) examined how self-efficacy and student satisfaction were linked predicting retention and persistence behaviors of students. In this study, DeWitz and Walsh examined how college student satisfaction contributed to understanding students' decisions to remain at an institution. The authors contended that students who had higher levels of self-efficacy tended to be more satisfied with their college life/experience. For their measures, they used the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire, College Self-Efficacy Inventory, Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy, and the Self-Efficacy Scale. Notably, these instruments assessed self-efficacy and elements of academic and social connectedness within the collegiate environment. The authors found students who reported higher levels of self-efficacy were more satisfied with their college life/experience. They also suggested students reporting high levels of self-efficacy demonstrated strong connections with their college environments and claimed their academic work was supported by the institution. The relation between self-efficacy and college student satisfaction lends support to Tinto's (1993) model of attrition because those students with greater self-efficacy capitalized on this ability to attain greater levels of academic and social integration.

**Implications based on self-efficacy.** RC models integrate the academic, social, and developmental frameworks needed to develop self-efficacy skills. Students who have high self-efficacy skills are more likely to find purpose and value in their university experience than those with lower self-efficacy (DeWitz et al., 2009). Students with lower

levels of self-efficacy may exhibit greater potential risk with respect to retention because these students are not being fully integrated into the collegiate and residential environment. Thus, those residential students who exhibit lower self-efficacy may not take advantage of all of the opportunities to live and study with peers who are in the same academic discipline or make connections to peers.

These academic and social connections that lead to and support engagement become important when considering holistic development of the student (Tinto, 1977, 1993). Given the ASU retention goal of 90% first-time freshman (FTF) persistence, closer consideration of engagement in the RC model is warranted. Further, assessment of engagement in addition to measuring student satisfaction will be crucial in working more effectively toward creating actions that move the institution toward the retention goal (ASU Charter and Goals, 2016). This is not to say that student satisfaction is not important, but going beyond current understandings will be crucial in providing a more effective structure for the ASU RCs, which will allow for additional pathways for student success, retention, and persistence.

RC environments are set up to provide an intentional environment where students will live, learn, and grow because they live on campus. In particular, RCs provide an ideal laboratory for developing students' self-efficacy because RCs can provide affordances that allow students to engage in mastery experiences with respect to academic and social situations or participate in vicarious experiences around academic and social matters. Taken together, RCs seem to be positioned to provide experiences to students to foster the development of self-efficacy skills that may assist in developing persistence and retention of students at the university.

## **Retention Models**

The reasons why students chose to leave or stay at a university have been varied and complicated and frequently they were affected by personal reasons. Students who were able to integrate into the collegiate setting became more successful at the institution (Tinto, 1977, 1993). Integration has been viewed as an active component in which students chose to connect more fully with the institution, which resulted in greater retention and collegiate success. Generally, college environments were similar and student services personnel offered the same type of student support that focused on assisting students (M. Brown, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

Institutional fit for a student has been shown to be an important factor with respect to student persistence and retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto suggested students who were successful at integrating academically and socially into university life were more likely to be retained. Academic integration was not merely related to academic grade performance; rather it included broader intellectual development associated with college-going and personal development of the young adult (Tinto, 1975). Thus, the academic classroom serves as an important vehicle to where formal knowledge was developed and where intellectual development occurred as well.

By comparison, social integration was viewed as students' ability to make social connections with other students in and outside of the classroom and with faculty members. For example, Tinto (1975) suggested social integration included,

Successful encounters in these areas [various social situations] result in varying degrees of social communication, friendship support, faculty support, and collective affiliation, each of which can be viewed as important social rewards

that become part of the person's generalized evaluation of the costs and benefits of college attendance and that modify his educational and institutional commitments.

(p. 107)

Notably, students who exhibited higher levels of academic and social integration were more likely be retained by the university (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

One of the major limitations of Tinto's (1975) theory was that the theory examined fit and not predictors of student success. High school GPA, personal support systems, and coping strategies were strong indicators for student success (DeWitz et al., 2009). Students who have been afforded the opportunity to attend a rigorous academic high school environment were more likely to be prepared to the demands of academic life in the collegiate setting (You need a reference, year). Students who had a strong family support system were more likely to be retained at the university. Students who have begun to master coping strategies have been able to deal with the complex emotional roller coaster of college. These factors were not accounted for in Tinto's theory and overall the theory failed to address the readiness factor of students who were coming into college (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002; Tinto, 1993).

## **Summary**

As a comprehensive public institution, ASU has prided itself on being an open access institution measured by whom they include and not whom they exclude. A goal of the ASU Charter was to improve first-year persistence to 90% (ASU Charter and Goals, 2016). ASU has implemented many innovative strategies to retain students. For example, Educational Outreach and Student Services (EOSS) has been committed to providing optimal experiences that were conducive to the learning and growth of each



student individually and collectively (EOSS, 2016). Student support programs have been broad ranging and provided learning niches for all students.

Moreover, ASU residential life has been identified as the pathway to ‘grow’ the university. Residential life has been tasked with growing their on-campus population (across all four locations) to 25,000 students by 2020. Additionally, Residential Life will be assisting with improving the first-year retention rate through the RC model. The size and scale of residential living at ASU has become one of the largest in the nation. Finally, the ASU Charter called for student-centered learning outcomes focused on the success of students individually and collectively.

The assessment of retention within the residential environment has been largely linked to student satisfaction with respect to residential facilities, programs, and services provided within the residence halls. Li et al. (2005) examined the development of Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs), special interest population Fresh Start. These Fresh Start residential communities had special policies and procedures for living within the residential community. In this study, the researchers used a survey instrument that has been used at this institution to assess the satisfaction of the students living in the Fresh Start communities. They found students living within these facilities were satisfied with the programs and services offered within the community. The major limitation was that this study did not indicate whether students chose to come back for another academic term. Although students enjoyed their residential experience, it was not clear how this enjoyment translated into persistence.

**Implications for the study.** College students want more than just to be satisfied with their experience. College students want to ensure that the financial, personal, and

familial investments in a college degree yield a solid return on investment. RC environments have potential to develop complete learning centers that foster holistic student development (James Rund, personal communication, October 2016). Further, RC environments can serve as learning-living laboratories that foster student retention. Students who live on campus have unique opportunities to connect more closely to academic approaches that foster retention and with peers than those who live off campus. RC models have provided for an intentional partnership between academic and housing units to create student-centered learning outcomes that foster student retention.

Moreover, connecting students from an RC environment with first-year, major courses designed to provide orientation to the university and its resources have the potential to affect students in powerful ways. In the present study, students living in an RC environment are also taking WPC 101, which has the potential to foster self-efficacy and student engagement that build persistence and retention.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

In this chapter the methodology for the study has been presented. First, I have presented a brief foundation for the study to situate it relative to the problem of practice. Second, the setting and participants for the research study have been introduced. Third, I have provided information regarding the intervention, the instruments including the survey and interviews, and the procedure of the project. Finally, I have discussed issues related to the validity, reliability, and limitations of the project.

#### **Brief Foundation**

The purpose of this action research project was to examine how student engagement develops when students live on-campus in the W. P. Carey Residential College (RC) at Arizona State University. As noted earlier, students were more likely to be retained and persist towards graduation when they were integrated socially and academically into their collegiate environment (Tinto, 1977, 1993). At ASU, residential students have had the opportunity to take advantage of various services and resources intended to promote their integration into the collegiate setting. RC environments provided more than just programmatic events that assisted with the engagement, connection, and development of students. RC environments along with university orientation courses like WPC 101 were structured to assist students to build a sense of self-efficacy to navigate the college environment. Self-efficacy, in turn, has the potential to serve as a major contributing factor for students' intention to return to the institution to complete an undergraduate degree. Creating an intentional student community

development framework that fostered engagement can assist with building self-efficacy skills needed for students to be retained and to persist to graduation.

## **Setting**

Arizona State University (ASU) has had an enrollment of 100,000+ students across four physical campus locations and online degree programs. ASU has served as a leader in innovation. Further ASU's New American University Charter specifically advocated innovation as a core practice in educating future leaders within a global context who were expected to affect local outcomes. ASU has demonstrated leadership in academic excellence and accessibility. One of the major institutional goals has been to improve the first-year persistence to 90% (ASU Charter and Goals, 2016). In promoting first-year persistence, the focus has been on the (a) the academic connection to ASU *and* (b) the sense of affinity and social connection first-year students develop for ASU. Thus, student engagement has been a central tenet of students' retention and persistence to graduation.

ASU Residential Life has maintained an on-campus population for 14,500 students living among four ASU campuses—Tempe, Polytechnic, West, and Downtown Phoenix. Students choosing to live on campus were housed in RC based on their academic majors. The RC model has been an intentional partnership between University Housing and an ASU academic college. Through this intentional partnership, a network of campus, academic, and student support services were provided for students living in a specific RC. Although each RC community has a specific set of programmatic events and student services, the underlying goal was to reach the 90% retention rate of first-year students within their college and ASU. By intentionally engaging students in their

residential environment, students were exposed to various opportunities to begin building connections to institution as a part of the collegiate experience.

Students living on campus have had a unique opportunity to live, learn, and grow with others. Through use of various activities, the staff has attempted to create an intentional environment of engagement, connection, and development for on-campus residential students. Nevertheless, not much information exists about how these residential college environments influence students to stay at ASU. Moreover, little was known about how the ASU orientation courses, like WPC 101, have also contributed to student retention.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were students living in the WPC RC community taking *WPC 101: Student Success in Business*. WPC 101 served as a method to connect students to staff members, provide resources, and explore ways in which students were able to become involved within W. P. Carey and at ASU. WPC 101 also served as a potential retention indicator if students were not performing well in the course which could indicate they were also having difficulties with other classes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I served as an Assistant Director for Residential Life at WPC RC and served as the chief academic initiatives leader for the RC. In that role, I worked to develop activities and programming that assisted students in connecting to other students and to the institution. My background has been in higher education and I have worked as a professional in Housing and Residential Life for 9 years. Further, I have worked in

multiple contexts in which student engagement was the focus of our efforts to foster success of students.

In addition to conducting the workshops in WPC 101, I participated in several other roles in the project. For instance, I recruited the participants, gathered pre- and post-intervention survey data, and conducted the interviews of students. I also analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data.

My positionality was as an insider because I was studying my own practice (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As an insider, I had intimate knowledge about the goals and procedures involved in fostering engagement through activities and programs in RCs and the university orientation courses. Nevertheless, I thoughtfully reflected on all aspects of the study, especially when I analyzed the qualitative data to ensure I accounted for any biases I might have had as a result of conducting and analyzing the action research study.

### **Intervention**

Engagement Workshop #1 focused on experiences of coming to ASU and how becoming engaged would assist with their success at ASU. The goal of Engagement Workshop #1 was to allow students to explore their “why” for being at ASU and what goals they had set for themselves. Thus, Engagement Workshop #1 activity was focused on understanding personal values and how those values influenced their decisions to engage in certain activities and opportunities. Although students came with values, they had learned and experienced the collegiate environment afforded them with opportunities to clarify and advance those values and ideas. Understanding values assisted students with refining and defining student engagement experiences. The assignment for this workshop was a writing assignment called *My Sun Devil Story*. The purpose of *My Sun*

*Devil Story* was to have students critically examine their values and beliefs they brought to ASU and how those values influenced goal attainment. This activity was aided by focusing on the intent and attitudes of becoming more deeply involved in ASU-sponsored activities that fostered engagement.

Engagement Workshop #2 was focused on students as individuals and the experiences from their personal life which influenced their engagement. The goal of Engagement Workshop 2 was to introduce the concept of engagement and how engagement affected their successes as students. I discussed why becoming engaged was important to them as students during their time at ASU. In this workshop, the content included the consideration of their individual strengths, which students brought to their collegiate experiences. The major activity of the workshop was to set SMART goals for engagement and academics. This activity was reviewed during subsequent workshops. The assignment for Engagement Workshop 2 was to participate in *iWeek*. *iWeek* provided students with the opportunity to learn about clubs and organizations at informational tables set up by the various student organizations. For the assignment, students were asked to list three to four different clubs they would like to explore during *iWeek* and provide bullet points explanations why they chose those organizations. Additionally, the students were asked to complete an *iWeek* engagement reflection assignment which emphasized the goals they had set for themselves in class and in their *My Sun Devil Story* assignment prior.

Engagement Workshop #3 focused on putting together the lessons they had learned in the classroom and from the first two workshops to build a comprehensive portfolio of engagement as they moved ahead at ASU. Engagement Workshop #3 began

with a review of the goals from Engagement Workshop #1 and a review of *My Sun Devil Story* from Engagement Workshop #2 including a review of key themes. The emphasis in Engagement Workshop #3 was to have students be involved in more intentional reflection regarding their attitudes and intentions for engagement. To make this more concrete to participants, the students participated in an Engagement Continuum activity. The Engagement Continuum allowed students to ‘visually’ understand where they were on the continuum with respect to their own experiences. The researcher read a set of statements and the students were able to choose on a continuum among three different locations, “I am more than likely to engage in these activities or experiences” (left), “I might engage in these activities or experiences” (center), “I am unsure/will not engage in these activities” (right). Students considered various engagement activities and considered where they were on the continuum with respect to the various engagement activities. The Engagement Workshop #3 assignment was to complete a reflection worksheet about their experiences through their classes thus far and the Engagement Workshops. Students completed this as an assignment to be turned in at the next class session of WPC 101.

### **Instruments**

I have described the two instruments in this section. The first instrument was a survey used to assess various aspects of engagement. The second instrument included a set of interview questions.

**Engagement survey.** The Engagement Survey was developed to assess the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions with respect to student engagement of students in the WPC101 course. The Engagement Survey allowed students to rate their experiences



using a 6-point, Likert-scale where 6 = *Strongly Agree*, 5 = *Agree*, 4 = *Slightly Agree*, 3 = *Slightly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*.

The Engagement Survey included the following constructs: Involvement Opportunities, Affinity Development, Campus Environment, ASU Community, Quality of Relationships, Self-Efficacy, and Returning to ASU. These constructs were included on the survey because they were key constructs in the research questions that guided the conduct of the study. In the following section, each of the constructs has been discussed and examples of representative items from the survey instrument have been provided. The construct Involvement Opportunities (Engagement) was used to assess students' involvement in a variety of activities offered by the university. Examples of items that were used to assess this construct were "I want to be attend ASU Sporting events (football, basketball, etc.);" and "I want to get to know the other students who live in my residence hall." Affinity Development was assessed to examine students' perceived 'connections' to ASU. Two examples of items were "I am developing a stronger bond to ASU;" and "Living on campus helping me develop stronger connections to ASU." Campus Environment (Engagement) was based on NSSE and it was used to assess whether students perceived ASU's environment to be helpful and supportive. Examples of items for this construct included "Going to the W. P. Carey Undergraduate Programs Office (UPO) has been helpful;" and "ASU's resources make me feel like I am supported."

The construct ASU Community (Attitudes) was intended to assess students' attitudes about ASU. Two representative items were "I enjoy being at ASU;" and "To me, ASU feels like a community because I can find others who share similar values and

beliefs.” The construct Quality of Relationships (Connections) was based on NSSE and it was included to assess students’ development of relationships with various groups at the institution. Representative items were “I am making connections with other students outside of the classroom setting;” and “I am making connections with student leaders in the residence halls (Community Assistant, Residential Engagement Leader, Peer Mentor, etc.).” Self-Efficacy (Self-Efficacy) assessed students’ beliefs about their abilities to navigate the system and succeed as ASU. Examples of items included “I am able to navigate the ASU ‘system;”” and “I am confident in my abilities to seek out campus support services when issues arise (ASU Counseling, ASU Wellness, etc.).” Finally, three items assessed students’ Intentions for returning for the spring semester. An example of one of the items was “I plan to re-enroll at ASU for the spring 2019 semester.” See Appendix A for the complete survey instrument.

**Interviews.** The semi-structured interview was composed of 17 questions. Questions assessed areas such as how students viewed engagement, how they perceived the Engagement Workshops, activities in which they were engaged, how they viewed their self-efficacy, and their intentions about returning for the spring semester. Several representative questions are “How has your work in WPC101 encouraged you to become more engaged on-campus;” “What engagement opportunities have you taken advantage of/participated in? Why did you select those particular opportunities;” and “Tell me about your intentions about returning for the spring semester. Will you be returning? Why or why not?” The complete set of interview questions has been provided in Appendix B. Notably, the last seven items were constructed to be parallel to the seven

constructs on the survey. In this way, the quantitative and qualitative data could be ‘triangulated’ to determine whether these data were complementary or disconfirming.

## **Procedure**

**WPC 101 setting the context for the course.** Each year, first-year students in W. P. Carey take *WPC101: Student Success in Business* course. The aim of the WPC 101 course was to provide students with some skills and knowledge about resources offered by ASU and W. P. Carey to ensure their success. Students who took WPC 101 were given different assignments to assist with the shaping their experiences for success during their first year at ASU. WPC 101 has been conducted as a semester long course taught by professional staff member within W. P. Carey. The researcher has been invited to serve as instructor for the fall 2018 semester. The researcher has taught WPC101 in previous semesters. In WPC 101, students were given the opportunity to meet other students and meet important staff members who were there to support students’ successes. Typically, a majority of the first-year cohort took these courses in the fall semester. The WPC 101 curriculum was focused on providing students with the pathway to resources and important services designed to assist with their success. Each lesson was developed to introduce students to a new academic skill to be used in the classroom setting or during their student engagement experiences.

**The actual procedure.** In the fall of 2018, the researcher taught a section of WPC 101 that began in mid-August when classes started. During the first two weeks, the researcher introduced the concept of engagement to the students in the course. As part of the week 2 class, students who had agreed to participate in the research part of the project, took the pre-intervention assessment using the Engagement Survey. Then in

week 3, Workshop 1 was conducted. During week 5, Workshop 2 was carried out. Finally, Workshop 3 was conducted during week 7. By distributing the workshops, students were provided time to complete their assignments and reflection prompts for the course.

Participants engaged in writing brief bullet point reflections after each workshop session. The following generic prompt was used, “Think about the workshop content. How does what we discussed in the workshop influence your thinking about being or becoming engaged at ASU?”

Following the completion of the three workshops, the post-intervention Engagement Survey was administered one week following the third workshop. Additionally, after the three workshops have been completed, individual interviews were conducted using the Interview Questions in Appendix D, as noted above. A timeline of research activities has been provided in Table 1. See Table 1.

Table 1

*Timeline of Research Activities*

Date	Intervention Developed	Outcome
May 2018	Survey Revised Interview Protocol Revised IRB Application	IRB Approval for survey and interview
June 2018-July 2018	Preparation for Fall Intervention	Preparing for fall intervention outcomes
Mid-August 2018	Pre-Assessment	Administer Pre-intervention Assessment Engagement Survey
Late-August 2018	Workshop #1	Workshop #1 conducted
Mid-September 2018	Workshop #2	Workshop #2 conducted

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Early-October 2018	Workshop #3	Workshop #3 conducted
Mid-October 2018	Workshop Reflection	Administer Post- Intervention Assessment Engagement Survey
Late-October 2018 to Mid- November 2018	Interviews	Conduct 8-10 student interviews

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### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Reliability analyses for the seven constructs were conducted. Then, the pre- and post-intervention Engagement Survey data were analyzed using a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether pre- and post-intervention scores for the seven constructs differed. Qualitative data were analyzed in the following way. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and entered into HyperRESEARCH. Subsequently, the transcript data was read and re-read several times and then it was coded with initial codes. Then these codes were gathered into larger categories, then into themes, and assertions were derived based on the themes.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Results from this study have been presented in the following two sections. In the first section, results from the quantitative data were presented. The second section included results from qualitative data. Quantitative data included a set of pre- and post-intervention engagement survey results from 15 WPC 101 students. Qualitative data were comprised of the two engagement reflective essays, final engagement reflection worksheet and six individual interviews. Prior to the results, I have provided some context for the data that were collected in the study.

#### **WPC 101 Student Engagement Workshops—Context for the Data**

For WPC 101, I infused three Engagement Workshops into the curriculum. Qualitative data came from these workshops and the interviews. The workshops focused on student engagement. Workshop 1, *Your Why*, focused on students' understanding of their personal narratives, goals/aspirations for their Sun Devil experience, and what they wanted to accomplish within their first-year at ASU. During workshop 1, students were asked to intentionally reflect on their own experiences by using a guided worksheet that included each essay element for their *My Sun Devil Story* assignment, which they were to complete after class. Students were given statement prompts that focused them on their personal histories prior to coming to ASU. Workshop 2, *The How*, focused on the involvement opportunities in which students could engage while at ASU. This workshop emphasized exposing students to various opportunities for involvement at ASU and within the W. P. Carey School of Business. The major assignment for workshop 2 was the *iWeek Club Comparison Worksheet*. Students attended iWeek activities such as

investigating various clubs, organizations, and so on and then students reflected on their involvement experiences in a written assignment. Workshop 3, *So what who cares*, focused their thinking on an end-of-semester activity and reflection of their experiences. For this workshop, students participated in a reflection activity, *Would I do this?*, in which students were asked to rate themselves on the continuum ranging from “I would do this activity”, “I might do this activity”, “I will not do this activity.”

Quantitative data came from a pre- and post-intervention surveys that included six constructs related to engagement and involvement. These data have been analyzed in the next section.

### **Results from the Quantitative Data**

Prior to conducting analysis of the quantitative data, Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities were determined using SPSS. The pre-intervention assessment reliabilities ranged from .65 to .84 with a median value of .80. The reliability for the scale of one construct fell below the criterion of .70, which has been considered to be an acceptable level of reliability. In two instances, for campus environment and ASU community scales, one variable was removed from each of the scales to improve the reliabilities. Thus, the overall data indicated students were responding consistently on the various scales. Notably, there was too little variability on the “Intention to return to ASU” scale to warrant further data analysis because almost all students indicated they “*Strongly Agree*” = 6 that they intended to return on each of the scales’ three items. The reliabilities for the six scales/constructs have been presented in Table 2 on the next page.

Table 2

*Pre-intervention Reliabilities for Six Scales/Constructs on the Student Survey*


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<u>Scale/Construct</u>	<u>Reliability</u>
Involvement	.83
Affinity Development	.82
Campus Environment*	.65
ASU Community^	.72
Quality of Relationships	.76
Self-Efficacy	.84

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\*—Note: Item 1 was deleted from the original scale so this scale was composed of four items.

^—Note: Item 3 was deleted from the original scale so this scale was composed of six items.

To determine the effect of the student's participation in the Engagement Workshops, I used repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze the quantitative data. The purpose in using repeated measures of ANOVA was determine whether the means for one or more constructs changed because of students' participation in the Engagement Workshops. Separate repeated measures of ANOVA were conducted for the six constructs to determine whether participation in the three workshops influenced students' perceptions of the constructs. The analysis for involvement was not significant,  $F(1, 14) = 3.04, p < .11$ . Details about this and other analyses for the six constructs have been provided in Table 3 and the means and standard deviations have



been presented in Table 4. See Table 3 and Table 4 on the next two pages. Similarly, the analysis for affinity development was not significant,  $F(1, 14) = 0.89, p < .37$ . Again, the repeated measures analysis for campus environment was not significant,  $F(1, 14) = 1.84, p < .20$ . Correspondingly, the analysis for ASU community was not significant,  $F(1, 14) = 3.96, p < .07$ . By comparison, the analysis for quality of relationships was significant,  $F(1, 14) = 5.52, p < .04$ , with  $\eta^2 = .283$ , which is a large within-subject's effect size using Cohen's criteria (Olejnik & Algina, 2000). Finally, the analysis for self-efficacy was not significant,  $F(1, 14) = 0.68, p < .43$ .

Table 3

*Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for the Six Constructs on the Student Survey Data  
(all tests conducted with 1 and 14 degrees of freedom)*

<u>Scale/Construct</u>	<u>F-test Statistic</u>	<u>p &lt;</u>	<u>Effect size</u>
Involvement	3.04	.11, ns*	—
Affinity Development	0.89	.37, ns	—
Campus Environment	1.84	.20, ns	—
ASU Community	3.96	.07, ns	—
Quality of Relationships	5.52	.04	.283
Self-Efficacy	0.68	.43, ns	—

\*—Note: ns means not significant.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations\* for Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores for the Six Constructs on the Student Survey*

<u>Scale/Construct</u>	<u>Pre-Intervention Scores</u>	<u>Post-Interv. Scores</u>
Involvement	4.63 (0.79)	4.94 (0.84)
Affinity Development	5.20 (0.62)	5.37 (0.51)
Campus Environment	5.00 (0.57)	5.25 (0.64)
ASU Community	5.31 (0.45)	5.59 (0.50)
Quality of Relationships	4.73 (0.73)	5.30 (0.68)
Self-Efficacy	5.46 (0.46)	5.57 (0.56)

\*—Note: Standard deviations have been presented in parentheses.

### **Results from the Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data results have been presented in two main sections: (a) engagement and goal setting essay reflections and (b) individual engagement interviews. For each section, a table is used to present the themes, their associated theme-related components and assertion(s). Quotes were used to support these claims.

The codes developed for this actions research study used holistic coding (Bazeley, 2007) and narrative coding (Contazzo, 1993; Dauite & Lightfood, 2004). In Vivo coding was used as the initial set coding going line by line. For the written assignments (*My Sun Devil Story*, *iWeek Reflection*, and Final Reflection Worksheet), the codes for all three assignment were individually coded with overlap between each round of coding on each

assignment. For the individual engagement interviews, in vivo coding was used in the same manner as the written engagement reflection essays. After the coding was done for each engagement reflection essay, final engagement worksheet and individual engagement, three major categories emerged: engagement, connection, development and personal success.

The codes within the category of engagement were based on the experiences in which students became involved or had intentions to become involved during their first semester. For example, the code of “involvement opportunity—intramurals” referred to students who had or wanted to become involved with intramural sport experiences. The codes within the category of connection were based on how students were connecting to the housing and university community. For example, the code of “self-efficacy—creating relationships” referred to how a student was planning on creating connections with other peers and had the intention to find connections through involvement. The codes within the category of development were based on the knowledge and confidence they had gained as a result of living on-campus and/or by becoming involved in various club and organizational opportunities. For example, the code of “self-efficacy—learning more about myself”, this code referred to how a student was learning more about themselves through meeting others in their residential community. The codes for personal success were based on the personal and academic goals student had set for themselves. For example, the code of “goal—first gen example” was based on students who identified as a first generation college student and wanted to set an example for other family members and/or for themselves with respect to college attainment.

Once the four categories were identified, there were many overlapping codes within each area between the engagement essay reflections, final engagement reflection worksheet, and individual interviews. Although the codes were put into one of four distinctive categories, through a process of code mapping certain codes began emerging as larger interconnected lines of familiarity. For example, the codes “involvement opportunity—intramurals”, “self-efficacy—creating relationships” and “goal—first gen example” created the beginning of the theme related component of *Being involved allowed for goal accountability*. This particular theme related component involved codes focused on students’ specific academic and engagement goals, the reason why a student had listed this as a goal, the reason why this particular goal was important, and how being engaged allowed them to complete their goal(s). Then theme-related components, which were associated, were gathered together to form themes. Continuing with the example, these led to the theme *Seeking opportunities involvement related to personal goals*. The assertion was then determined through an holistic understanding of the entire theme-related codes, emerging theme and led to the production of the assertion *Becoming engaged in activities broadened students’ experiences*.

**Engagement and goal setting essay reflections.** As part of the WPC 101 course, students were required to complete two essay reflection assignments: *My Sun Devil Story* and *iWeek Engagement Reflection*, and the final engagement reflection worksheet. *My Sun Devil Story* essay focused on the personal background of each student and their individual goals for their first year and beyond. This essay was assigned within the first three weeks of the course to assist students with understanding why they were at ASU and what they want to garner from their Sun Devil experience. *iWeek Engagement*

*Reflection* focused on the student involvement opportunities available at ASU and within W. P. Carey School of Business. Students were asked to attend an event sponsored by W. P. Carey called *iWeek*. *iWeek* is a time when W. P. Carey student organizations showcase and distribute information regarding their club or organization. When they intended purpose of *iWeek*, students were able to speak with other peers about their involvement at ASU and how to best become involved in clubs and organizations. The Final Engagement Worksheet was an in-class assignment in which students were asked to reflect on their learning from the past semester. The reflection allowed students to rate their level of intent with respect to whether they were returning to ASU.

Holistic coding was used to code both of the essay assignments based on a student's reflections of the personal, academic and involvement goals. Holistic coding was applicable when the researched already had a general idea of what to investigate in the data, or "to 'chunk' text into broad topic areas, as a first step to seeing what is there" (Bazeley, 2007). The holistic coding approach allowed me to develop the broader categories that evolved into developing themes and subsequent assertions (Saldaña, 2015). This approach allowed 'student voice' to drive the narrative of their current and future experiences while attending ASU.

To provide an advance organizer for these data, I have provided the themes from the goal setting essay reflections and final engagement reflection and their corresponding theme-related components and assertions in Table 5 on the next page.

Table 5

*Theme-Related Components, Themes, and Assertions Based on Goal Setting Essay Reflections from My Sun Devil Story, iWeek Club Comparison and the Final Engagement Reflection*

Theme-related components	Theme	Assertion
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Being at ASU allowed students to create their own sense of achievement</li> <li>2. Living on-campus allowed students to learn about others and various opportunities</li> <li>3. Building close relationships with peers, staff, and faculty was important</li> </ol>	1. Creating personal and academic aspirations for ASU	1. Student goals were focused on future personal and academic achievements.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Becoming involved has allowed students to understand better their interests</li> <li>2. Being involved allowed for goal accountability</li> <li>3. Becoming involved focused on supporting academic goals</li> </ol>	2. Seeking opportunities for involvement related to personal goals	2. Becoming engaged in activities broadened students' experiences.

**Theme 1: Creating personal and academic goal aspirations for ASU.**

Assertion 1 stated, *Student goals were focused on future personal and academic achievements*. The first essay assignment allowed students to intentionally reflect “why” they were attending ASU. Assertion 1 themes about creating personal and academic aspirations were representative of thinking from the *My Sun Devil Story* essay assignment. During the subsequent Engagement Workshop, I continued to have students reflect on their “why” for attending ASU and opportunities being presented to them.

Three related theme components embodied the theme about personal and academic aspirations which led to Assertion 1: (a) being at ASU allowed students to discover their passion and interests, (b) living on-campus allowed students to learn about others and various opportunities, and (c) building close relationships with peers, staff, and faculty was important.

***Being at ASU allowed students to create their own sense of achievement.*** As they attended ASU, students indicated they understood they had a broad set of choices that allowed them to discover their interests and passions. For example, one student indicated why she attended ASU and her motivations to do well when she wrote,

My first eldest brother dropped out of high school and moved back to Chicago with his biological mother, however, when my second brother was old enough to go to college, he joined the navy but was kicked out two years later. My eldest sister went to Governor State University in Chicago, but soon dropped out, moved back to Arizona, and got pregnant. My parents never attended a traditional four-year college because they were busy doing other things at the time. These are all immense factors as to why I've decided to attend college, I learned from their mistakes and I want to be a role model for my little sister.

Another student wrote, "I wanted to go to college to prove to myself that coming from the life that I came from can't stop me from becoming successful." A third suggested,

My parents have always tried their best to get me and my siblings what we wanted, but we also had to learn how to work for what we want. Being a minority, I didn't realize until I was older the extra effort it would take for me to attain

something due to financial problems. My parents did not go to college; therefore, I knew I would have to in order to pursue what they couldn't.

Another student wrote,

I chose ASU for a variety of reasons, and I am happy with my decision. ASU matches who I am. First off, ASU has so much to offer! There are unlimited amounts of opportunity here. I am the type of person who is very involved and invested in my school, and ASU gives me the amount of involvement I am seeking.

In sum, when students wrote about their interests and reasons for attending ASU, they offered a variety of explanations. Nevertheless, explanations in their essays typically included rationales that demonstrated personal achievement as a primary motivating factor.

***Living on campus allowed students to learn about others and various opportunities.*** Most students indicated they wanted to form closer personal relationships with new people. The students in this study all lived on campus and had the opportunity to be involved in different ways within the campus community. Students noted living on campus afforded them the occasion to learn about different opportunities. To illustrate, one student wrote,

I think living on campus has made me feel more involved with the school because my best friends are my roommates, and most of the people I have met or hung out with I've met through the dorms. Living on campus is the best way to become involved right away because you meet so many more people and you feel connected to ASU living right there. Becoming involved with clubs and



organizations will help me feel like ASU is the right place for me because it will make this big school feel smaller.

Another student offered a similar thought, when she wrote,

Another thing that has been extremely convenient for me has been living on campus, everything is super easy to access, my community assistant has been there to answer all of my lingering questions, and there have been multiple events in my community room every week which has helped me open up and expand my knowledge on college.

A third student penned, “Living on campus has assisted me in getting involved because everything is so close and within walking distance, and most of my peers live right next to me so I can easily make friends and everything is accessible.” Finally, a fourth student commented,

I live in the dorms, so I am always seeing people and meeting new friends even just walking down my hall. Living on campus has made it so much easier to talk to people and make plans to get involved in ASU together.

These statements exemplified the thoughts and feelings students held with respect to engagement as a result of living on campus. Living on campus afforded students close proximity to resources and access to staff who were trained to provide assistance and aid students to be more knowledgeable about how to achieve their goals and aspirations.

***Building close relationships with peers, staff, and faculty was important.***

Creating intentional relationships was a major goal for each student. Although living on-campus was an important factor to building initial relationships, students recognized the need to build relationships with others outside of the residence hall. Students

demonstrated their intentions to seek out academic- and student-service related resources. Further, they indicated they wanted to develop an intentional connection to these resources.

As one student reflected upon building close relationships, she wrote, “I jump at every chance I have to introduce myself to someone new. Making connections and meeting new people is one of the main things that has been easy to do here.” Another student wrote about the importance of relationships, when she scribed,

People have told me I am friendly and kind. I have also been told that I have good communication and people skills. I am most proud of my people skills because they have improved greatly over the past few months and even since getting to ASU.

In the essay, a third student wrote,

I really think that just the different connections that I’m able to make like having my CA so available. [She] is awesome. I love her, and she makes a point to send anything that’s going on campus into the group chat to stuff that we can attend and go meet new people.

And a fourth added,

I walked in a little lost and I didn’t really know what my major was or what I wanted to do. I just knew something business, and she [my CA] asked me my interests and what I liked doing and gave me a bunch of club recommendations and recommendations after I graduate, and she told me her story, which was similar to mine. We have a lot of the same interests, and she recommended

Supply Chain, and then I made a meeting with my advisor, and I'm switching to Supply Chain.

These students had similar reflective statements, which demonstrated the power of relationships for first-year students at ASU . Active involvement and participation in the ASU and residential community supported students as they created their own space for networking and building relationships with others.

**Theme 2: Seeking opportunities for involvement related to personal goals.**

Assertion 2 stated, *Becoming engaged in activities broadened a student's experience.*

Assertion 2 themes were based on the *iWeek Club Comparison* reflection essay assignment. For this assignment, In past offerings of the course, the iWeek assignment did not include an intentional reflection as part of the course. By comparison, the Engagement Workshops were centered around purposeful reflection so I included a short reflective essay portion of the assignment so students could thoughtfully consider their experiences during the iWeek assignment. Three related theme components embodied the theme which led to Assertion 2: (a) becoming involved has allowed students to understand better their interests, (b) being involved allowed for goal accountability, and (c) becoming involved focused on supporting academic goals.

***Becoming involved has allowed students to understand better their interests.***

Students' reflections focused on using a "try it out" approach to becoming involved. For example, iWeek provided a time for students to speak with others from organizations. Students focused on either a personal or academic interest. Moreover, this allowed students to take the time to determine which organizations would work for them. Students defined being engaged as "joining one club or organization" during their time

ASU. Students recounted that although there were many different clubs and organizations during iWeek and at ASU, they were particular about which experiences they wanted to have. Students' experiences ranged from being involved with American Marketing Association to joining a fraternity or sorority during their first year at ASU. Students understood the positive benefits of becoming involved and this was illustrated in the following statements. One student wrote,

I can benefit from being involved at ASU in many different ways, and not many people get that or they're too afraid to get out there and be their self in front of strangers, but being involved is one of the keys to success.

Likewise, another demonstrated this understanding, when she recorded, "The goals I've set in My Sun Devil story helped influence my ability to join a club because I wanted to meet new people and make friends and joining a club is a perfect way to do that."

A third student offered this comment in her essay, "... all the discussions that we've gone over about businesses and whatnot, it's made me think more about myself thinking about like all right, this is my time, this is my future now." And a fourth scribed,

I chose the organizations I spoke to during iWeek because I love fashion and the fashion in business club is exactly what I'm looking for. I think it would help me get an internship early on in my college career and possibly set me up for a job in the future.

Taken together, these statements were representative of and summarized students' understanding about the benefits of being involved. As a result, students were motivated to create social connections and improve their abilities to network. These outcomes were

consistent with W. P. Carey Residential College's strong emphasis on students making at least one connection in the classroom, in a social setting, and with a staff member.

Involvement in clubs and organizations afforded W. P. Carey students the opportunity to create these intentional connections.

***Being involved allowed for goal accountability.*** Students were asked to reflect on their potential and future involvement in clubs, organizations, and other campus opportunities. Although becoming involved was an important lesson reiterated throughout the Engagement Workshops, students were provided with opportunities to expand on involvement in their own ways to assist in their success at ASU. Students demonstrated the desire to become or became involved in different opportunities. One student offered,

An engaged student is a student that is involved in clubs and doing well academically. That student builds connections with people and also helps in the community. I believe as a student that you have to set high expectations for yourself to be successful because if you set your expectations low then you won't be able to achieve the most out of yourself.

Similarly, another wrote,

The goals I have set for myself assist me in knowing what clubs/organizations I can join to better myself and my career. On the other hand, you can also go outside of your comfort zone and be a part of organizations that push you to improve in ways you couldn't imagine.

Another student alluded to becoming involved as she described how class influenced her when she offered, "I think I've definitely changed a lot. That was a question in my

philosophy class, and we had to go really in depth with it. But yeah, I think I've definitely changed a lot. I feel like I see things differently.”

In sum, students expressed their own understandings of becoming involved and how that influenced accountability for goals and other aspects related to academic endeavors. Being involved afforded students greater opportunities move toward reaching personal and professional goals.

***Becoming involved focused on supporting academic goals.*** Students understood the benefits of becoming involved. Notably, some described experiences with which they had already chosen to become involved. For a majority of students, involvement would come later as they continued at ASU. A unique aspect of the iWeek reflection essays were the ways students were able to articulate their reasoning for becoming involved over time. For instance, one student penned,

Being an engaged student to me means to get involved within the community to see what it has to offer, not only to help others, but to help yourself also. Some of the goals I set for myself this year is [sic] to get to know myself, my major, and my interests more by getting involved with as many clubs that I feel suit me.

iWeek has helped me get a head start on this goal, I want to join clubs that have to do with my major to know if I made the right decision or not.

Another student noted how involvement was focused on academics when she wrote,

It [WPC 101] definitely gives me more ideas of what I could do here. I haven't done any of the engagement things really besides I went to the freshman stuff in the beginning of the year. The stuff was fun, but after that, after the first week, I

feel like I haven't really been engaged just through I just use school, like what I have to do.

A third provided a similar rationale about involvement when she wrote,

I think that students just need to be able to focus on their classes and make that their number one priority even with a job and with friends and everything, you just have to make school your number one priority.

For these students, being engaged had an instrumental purpose, they wanted to ensure involvement was related to their academic performance. At least, these students suggested that initially their thinking about involvement was related to their studies and classes. Students wanted to focus on achieving their involvement on academic goals before initiating other involvement opportunities.

**Individual engagement interviews.** Six individual interviews were conducted with students who voluntarily agreed to have a conversation regarding their experiences at ASU, WPC 101, and the Engagement Workshops. The individual interviews consisted of 17 open-ended questions in a semi-structured format, which allowed for follow-up questions. The interviews varied in length between 19-29 minutes. All students who were interviewed, lived on-campus in the W. P. Carey Residential College Community and were first-year students at ASU. Three students were out-of-state residents and the other three were Arizona residents.

Narrative coding was used to code the six individual interviews. Narrative coding allowed me to apply the conventions of (primary) literary elements and analysis to qualitative texts most often in the form of stories (Saldaña, 2015). Narrative coding—and analysis—blends concepts from humanities, literary criticism, and the social science

since the coding and interpretation of participant narratives can be approached from literary, sociological/sociolinguistic, psychological, and anthropological perspectives (Contazzo, 1993; Dauite & Lightfood, 2004). Narrative coding was appropriate for exploring participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which was a legitimate way of knowing: “some...stories should be sufficiently trusted to be left unaccompanied by critique or theory” (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1985). When examining students’ experiences with respect to engagement and involvement, narrative coding allowed for students’ voices to aid in deriving meaning to create a collective category, themes and eventually assertions. Table 6 displayed the theme-related components, themes, and assertions based on the interview data on the next page.



Table 6

*Theme-Related Components, Themes, and Assertions based on Individual Engagement Interviews*

Theme-related components	Theme	Assertion
1. Being aware of involvement opportunities helped students create connections 2. Living on-campus allowed students to thrive in their ASU experience	Capitalizing on opportunities to develop intentional engagement	1. Students were afforded opportunities to create deeper connections and affinity to ASU.
1. Experiencing the ASU campus environment supported students to find their place within ASU 2. Living on campus provided students with opportunities to create relationships	Developing community connections	2. Students who have taken advantage of resources and involvement opportunities have created deeper friendships and connections with peers.
1. Continuing at ASU included developing confidence to meet demands 2. Attaining success was about more than scholastic progress	Building confidence and broad-based success	3. Students have grown with respect to connecting to the campus and developing the confidence to continue at ASU.

**Theme 1: Capitalizing on opportunities to develop intentional engagement.**

Assertion 1 suggested, *Students were afforded opportunities to create a deeper connections and affinity to ASU.* Becoming involved or the intent of becoming involved coupled with living on-campus gave students the ability to find more and deeper connections to ASU. Two theme-related components comprised the theme which led to Assertion 1: (a) being aware of involvement opportunities helped students create connections and (b) living on-campus allowed students to thrive in their ASU experience.

***Being aware of involvement opportunities helped students create connections.***

As part of the Engagement Workshops, the content focused on how being involved could assist students with understanding their interests and passions and developing themselves more fully as individuals through involvement in a group or organization. During the individual interviews, students noted that although they did not take advantage of all involvement opportunities, they were aware the opportunities existed. Students suggested having the information available had been helpful during their first semester at ASU, because they may see the information posted elsewhere at a later time. During the interview, one student indicated,

I think it's helped me, well first, find out what I truly might want to do, because we've gone over those activities of who are you, what do you want to do, and how you're gonna do it. Things like that. And I think putting those two together really helps students see what's really right in front of them, because if you give them who are you, what do you want, and then you present them with clubs, organizations with very similar views, I think that helps make a great connection between who you are and what you want to do in the school you go to, and I think WPC 101 helps do that.

A second student alluded to the notion of connection when she claimed, It's[WPC] introduced me to the different things or the different organizations I can join that some of them I didn't know about before, so I definitely it's shown me the amount of different organizations that I can join now.

Similarly, a third described how she could benefit from being connected when she maintained, "I would say being involved and being present in your school and being

proud of your school and just getting the best experience you can out of it and engaging in everything.”

The aim of WPC 101 was provide students with information so they became aware of resources that supported connecting to ASU. By asking students to reflect on this information, WPC 101 fostered students’ efforts with respect to connecting to the institution through use of resources, participation in activities, and development of knowledge about ASU.

*Living on campus allowed students to thrive in their ASU experience.* The institutional student service tag, “Thrive at ASU” sums up the living-on-campus experience. Students who lived on campus were in close proximity to academic and student services resources. Particularly within the W. P. Carey Residential Community, the physical layout of the community provided access to various academic and student service related resources. Students’ interview responses demonstrated how living on campus allowed them to meet others, participate in different experiences, and supported them to be more successful. With regard to their experience of living on the campus, one student maintained,

It’s because I’m right next to everything. I met a bunch of different people in my dorm alone. Just being on campus allowed me to really experience a culture that I wouldn’t have been able to experience if I was just at home, because I’d go to campus and just go back home. I wouldn’t be around all these people.

Another student claimed,

Just it's gotten me out of my shell meeting all these new people. I've always been kind of shy and nervous to meet new people, but now I'm meeting new people every day. It's always a new experience and I love it.

Finally, a third student described how living on campus fostered a powerful experience when she shared,

So, I guess by living on campus, you see all these people having fun doing events, and then you go to those events with your friends and then you find out what's really happening, and that engages you into all these different things that you can do.

These statements summarized how students felt their on-campus living experiences positively supported their overall ASU experience. For instance, although one student's home was within five miles of the ASU Tempe campus, she chose to live on campus to participate in a holistic collegiate experience. Moreover, all students noted their on-campus living experience allowed them to build confidence in their abilities to continue at ASU. Students also claimed that living on campus made them feel more welcome and a part of the ASU community. For example, one student stated,

It's made me feel welcomed. ... I feel like if you see any professor or anyone in a suit and you needed help, if they work for ASU, they would do whatever they could to help you no matter what it is, you know. They could be going to a lecture, but if you [were] ten minutes late to a lecture in helping one student, I feel like almost every professor, any ASU employee would do it.

**Theme 2: Developing community connections.** Assertion 2 stated, *Students who have taken advantage of resources and involvement opportunities have created*

*deeper friendships and connections with peers.* Students have been able to build connections in multiple ways. Most have resulted from peer-to-peer connections. Others have been developed by asking for assistance/guidance and/or becoming involved. Two theme-related components comprised the theme which led to Assertion 2: (a) experiencing the ASU campus environment supported students to find their place within ASU and (b) Living on campus provided students with opportunities to create relationships outside of the classroom.

***Experiencing the ASU campus environment supported students to find their place within ASU.*** With ASU being the largest public institution in the nation, students can become overwhelmed by the sheer number of students as well as the number of choices related to opportunities as such a large institution. In their interviews, all students indicated ASU provided a welcoming and supportive atmosphere, which fostered student success. Students suggested the campus environment provided them with the ability to create their own path for success which was unique to their experiences. Moreover, one student found the campus environment supported her by providing a sense of community. . Specifically, she said, “I enjoy being at ASU because it the campus feels like a whole community. The most challenging thing at ASU is definitely keeping up with grades and social life. It was hard to manage both.” Another student expressed this concept about community when she said,

[There are] many moving parts between the maintenance people who I see driving around who I've had the pleasure of talking to and they're working on the grounds. Then you have the professors who are teaching the classes and doing everything for their students. It's all one big team. And then presidents [*sic*] who

are doing the best for the University, all one big team working to make the best graduates they can in four years.

The size of an institution can be a challenge for students. Other students commented on how the university's environment allowed them to "restart" who they were because of the opportunities found at ASU. Taken together, students suggested they were able to find their place within ASU and the ASU community.

***Living on campus provided students with opportunities to create relationships.***

Peer-to-peer connections have been shown to be the cornerstone of students' success and retention at the university. During the interviews, students claimed they were able to connect with a multitude of individuals at ASU. Nevertheless, nothing was more powerful than the importance of peer connections. During the interviews, all students suggested the ability to "make friends" was an important factor that supported their intention to remain at ASU and be successful. One student mentioned,

We have a lot of classes together. So, we're in the same cohort, and we have all those, and we have the same philosophy class. And she's introduced me to other people too that has really helped. And I don't think would've even talked to her if we didn't have the same WPC class.

She continued by saying,

The thing I've enjoyed most is the amount of people I've met. I've made so many new friends, and it's real easy. It's easy to meet people here. I can just introduce myself to anybody and they're just open to be like oh my name's whatever.

Another student offered the following comment on connecting with people at ASU as a result of living on campus,

Just it's gotten me out of my shell meeting all these new people. I've always been kind of shy and nervous to meet new people, but now I'm meeting new people every day. It's always a new experience and I love it.

Another student described how living on campus afforded engagement opportunities when she stated,

So, I guess by living on campus, you see all these people having fun doing events, and then you go to those events with your friends and then you find out what's really happening, and that engages you into all these different things that you can do.

To summarize, students who lived on campus were afforded formal and informal opportunities to develop relationships that fostered engagement and connections to ASU. For example, some students developed friendships based on having the same classes, whereas others made friends by meeting new people in their dorms or participating in more formal, scheduled events.

**Theme 3: Building confidence and broad-based success.** Assertion 3 indicated, *Students have grown with respect to connecting to the campus and developing the confidence to continue at ASU.* During the interviews, students were asked to respond to a series of questions about their understanding of their personal growth. Two theme-related components comprised the theme which led to Assertion 3: (a) continuing at ASU included developing confidence to meet demands and (b) attaining success was about more than scholastic progress.

*Continuing at ASU included developing confidence to meet demands.* During the interviews, all six students indicated they would be returning to ASU for the spring

2019 semester. When asked, “Do you believe you are the same person from when you started the fall semester?” The answer for all students was no. All students had undergone changes about their abilities to achieve success at the university. Moreover, they had developed a stronger sense of confidence to continue at ASU. Factors that influenced their thoughts included: being the first person in their family to complete college, senses of community derived from their residence hall experiences and living on campus, and performing better than when they were in high school. The development of confidence was evident when they described how their involvement would continue to support them to be successful. One student described her experience about building a sense of confidence—“a can do attitude” when she said,

It just seems so achievable. It seems like a lot of the people here, especially the people that worked to help me be this successful, it seems very, I don't know, achievable I guess. It's something that is possible to do because of all the resources that I tried to take advantage of like meeting my academic advisor and her helping me. So, it doesn't make it seem like it's impossible, like it's definitely something that I can do.

Notably, students have grown in their confidence through experiencing challenging times as one student noted when she said, “It's just beginning. I can't quit now. You know, after me going through everything that I've gone through this semester has strengthened my drive to want to stay here and want to keep bettering myself.” Taken together, students developed confidence in overcoming challenges and moving forward toward their goals. This ‘can do’ confidence was apparent in students’ responses and it boded well for their continued success in their efforts as ASU.



*Attaining success was about more than scholastic progress.* During the interviews, it became evident that students' learning has taken place beyond the scope and reach of the classroom. Students invested time and energy in learning about the campus environment including various resources and how those could affect their lives. In particular, one student recognized this broader scope of learning when she claimed,

I can't lose motivation. You just have to; even, if you're not sure what you're going to do, like I'm still not sure. ... I thought I came in thinking that I was gonna do this for the rest of my life, but then I'm like maybe I don't. Like why am I here. But you have to remember that you just have to stay it through [*sic*]. You just have to [stay with it and] you'll figure out more of what you like. And when you become more engaged in your classes and other things, I feel like that will help me discover more. Because I've learned so much just from being here. More about myself.

Another student shared similar sentiment when she maintained, "Usually I'll have to remember what the end goal is. But I was really out of it the past two months, and I've lost motivation like I didn't really care about school anymore, but I realize I'm here for a reason. I need to do what I'm supposed to do because I'm here."

Although students were concerned about their academic performances, they also exhibited interests in developing their personal sides, which was evident in their responses. Their motivations extended to developing themselves and focusing on bigger issues such as 'being here for a reason.'

**Summary.** Taken together, the qualitative data suggested students created personal and academic aspirations for ASU and their initial involvements were related to

personal goals. Additionally, they took advantage of opportunities to become engaged in small ways, developed community connections that supported them, and built confidence and skills for broad-based success.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this action research study is to examine the influence of Engagement Workshops infused into WPC 101, which focused on student engagement and involvement for those who live in the W. P. Carey Residential College setting. The intervention is an added curriculum supplement to the WPC 101 curriculum. Chapter 5 is presented in the following sections: (a) complementarity and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, (b) explanation of results, (c) limitations, (d) implications for practice, (e) implications for research, and (f) personal lessons learned.

#### **Complementarity and Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

Complementarity refers to the consistency between quantitative and qualitative data (Greene, 2007). Complementarity indicates the quantitative and qualitative data lead to the same conclusions. Given the absence of changes in many of the quantitative variables, it is more difficult to determine and make statements about complementarity. Significant increases in the quality of relationships quantitative variable are mirrored in some of the qualitative data, especially students' interview responses about developing friendships and other connections to peers. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative support each other with respect to the importance of relationships.

#### **Explanation of Results**

Kuh (2003) defined student engagement as the time and energy students devoted to educationally purposeful activities and events. These activities and events are broadly based and include engagement in the use of university resources, building connections to others, and feeling one is part of the larger university community, and so on. Notably,

Kuh (2003, 2009) found students who were more engaged, persisted in their studies and were retained by the institution. To facilitate retention, he noted institutions intentionally created opportunities and provided routes for students to participate in activities leading to student success. Although this definition serves as a foundational perspective to student engagement and involvement, the critical question related to this study is, how do these considerations apply to first-year students?

ASU offers various education-related, purposeful activities with the intent that students become engaged. For example, having students live in college residential communities and offering orientation-like classes such as WPC 101 are purposefully conducted to foster engagement by students. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such efforts, particularly those during the first semester of students' academic careers warrants thoughtful consideration. For instance, what are the developmental trajectory and the narrative for first-year students with respect to engagement? Further, what do the results from this study suggest about early development of engagement? Naturally, when considering a developmental model of engagement, first-year students are just beginning to develop their engagement in the university setting. In particular, first-semester students' understanding of engagement likely has a strong developmental component in which engagement and its various components are only beginning to emerge.

Notably, ASU is an institution of vast resources and highly interconnected experiences, which allow students to intentionally find their own paths to success. Living in the WPC residential college setting and taking WPC 101 offer first-year students opportunities to become aware of experiences and resources, and most importantly a space to connect. As the discussion in this section proceeds, it will become evident these

opportunities and experiences are woven together in a complex way that influences the development of early engagement by first-semester students.

In general, the results of the quantitative data show strong mean averages in which students indicated they “Agree” to the statement with regard to the construct being assessed. For example, affinity development, campus environment, ASU community, and self-efficacy had means of 5.00 or higher. Thus, first-year students taking WPC 101 already have a strong affinity for ASU, believe the campus environment and ASU community are welcoming and helpful, and have a strong sense of self-efficacy toward accomplishing tasks and goals at ASU. When considering the means for the quantitative data alongside the findings from the qualitative data, three key areas emerge: campus environment, ASU community, and quality of relationships. These areas are especially important when considering the developmental phase of student engagement for these first-semester students.

**Quality of relationships.** Notably, quality of relationships is the only quantitative variable to increase significantly from pre- to post-intervention assessment. Moreover, students emphasize relationships with peers in the qualitative data, particularly the interview data. Students in this study indicate relationships with others becomes key to their success. The WPC Residential College and WPC 101 afford opportunities for students to form and build relationships with peers and university staff members. In particular, living on campus provides many opportunities for students to get to know others, which is illustrated in the following quote.

So, I guess by living on campus, you see all these people having fun doing events, and then you go to those events with your friends and then you find out what’s

really happening, and that engages you into all these different things that you can do.

This statement encapsulates the reason that living on-campus permits students to develop a social group, which allows them to experience other events and opportunities. Thus, living on campus allows students to connect to other students and to be informed about what is going in the residential community and at ASU. Moreover, the relationships students build are the experiences they will remember. Thus, from a developmental perspective, taking advantage of opportunities to build connections with others, especially peers, appears to be a central aspect of initial engagement by first-semester students.

**ASU community.** As evident in the findings, students feel a sense of pride in their institution and believe living on campus provides them with the opportunity to be part of the community. Living on campus affords students the occasion to find similar interests with others in their major. The Residential College model is set up to focus on first-year business students and as a result programmatic, academic and other residential experiences are all themed around a ‘business mindset’ of developing skills appropriate to students in business as well as affording instances to make a deeper connection to the ASU community in general. The following comment illustrates this sense of genuine community with others on their floor.

I love the community honestly. I can walk in my dorm and everyone will always greet me. I mean everyone just is neighborly. .... I like how everyone’s; it’s like kind of our own little neighborhood; our own community. Yeah.

Thus, among first-semester students developing a sense of community and feeling they are fitting into that community appears to be a fundamental component of initial engagement. For students, the building community is a central focus of how they see themselves succeeding. Moreover, it is clear the WPC Residential Community is central in developing students' initial engagement outcomes.

**Campus environment.** ASU offers a wide variety of campus resources and support services that foster students' successes. As a course, WPC 101 aims to building students' "toolboxes" for understanding various college and campus resources. In the study, students understand the importance of seeking out assistance and using campus resources. Students claim being at ASU allows them to focus on being successful and achieve their goals because they can draw on the support they need. Students feel empowered because they believe they are part of the campus environment. Additionally, students who live on campus express a powerful narrative of feeling a deeper connection to the campus environment simply due to their proximity.

ASU Housing strives to create an optimal living/learning environment where students can be successful and thrive. The ASU campus environment offers a rich diversity of campus resources for students including student services in close proximity of their residential hall. Thus, W. P. Carey residential students' academic resources are embedded in their residential setting including, for example, academic advisors and tutoring. The integration of the academic resources in the residential environment creates opportunities for students to be successful.

Finally, providing academic and other resources to students contributes to the development of institutional engagement among first-semester students. Notably, they

come to understand the institution is concerned about their success as evident in bringing academic and other resources ‘right to their living setting’ without their needing to go out of their way to seek out those resources.

**Summary.** Taken together, the results of this study extend Kuh’s (2003, 2009) work on engagement. In particular, the results of this study provide a richer understanding of the beginnings of engagement as seen through the eyes of first-semester college students. The ‘roots of institutional engagement’ appear to include such basic matters as (a) making strong connections to peers, (b) capitalizing on community opportunities, and (c) taking advantage of campus environments that make necessary resources easily accessible. These three ‘roots’ lay the foundation on which students can build subsequently to develop greater levels of engagement.

### **Limitations**

The four main limitations of the study include (a) threats to validity—history and maturation; (b) researcher bias; (c) study’s ‘contextual boundedness,’ and (d) convenience sampling. I present each limitation in the following section.

The first limitation includes two threats to validity—history and maturation. During the study, there are many factors that could influence the outcomes. The first threat to validity is history. Specifically, other events that occurred during the study, but are not part of the intervention could influence the results. For example, students who worked closely with advisors may have higher scores than those who did not. The second threat to validity is maturation. Mere development as young adults such as taking on more responsibility, which is not part of the intervention, may influence scores on self-efficacy.



The second limitation is research bias. Due the fact, I am not only not the researcher, but the instructor of WPC 101 bias could play a role my interpretations of the results. This could be especially true of the qualitative results. To combat this issue, I employed thoughtful reflection throughout the coding and interpretive processes. As part of my reflection process, I would keep a reflection journal of the steps I made within each phase of the Engagement Workshops. As an instructor, I was paired up with a student facilitator (SFA) for WPC 101. I explained the concept of my research to the SFA and what I was going to be doing within each workshop. Together, we helped develop the Engagement Workshop discussion points and then would assist in facilitation of these activities. At the conclusion of each class, I would discuss with the SFA what portions of class went well and which portions needed work. After this discussion, I would take some time to write in my reflection the aspects of the intervention that did not go as planned and spent time to ensure in the next engagement reflection workshop, I would make sure to recap. Additionally, at the end of each course I would ask the students to do a daily reflection of class called “so what, who cares.” During this time, we would discuss how the material relates to their understanding of engagement and transition to ASU. This was very beneficial as the students appeared to be honest in their feedback which helped with next week’s class. Through the reflective journaling and consistent feedback from the SFA and students, the intervention proceeded much better which in turn gave the very rich data to complete this action research study.

Further, with respect to bias in coding the qualitative results, I used careful, reflective processes to minimize bias. At each step of the qualitative analysis process, I would revisit and reflect on the data to confirm data support higher-level

interpretations. Thus, I made substantial efforts to minimize bias in the qualitative data analyses.

The third limitation for this research study is the ‘contextual boundedness’ of the study. In action research, studies are limited in terms of applicability because they are context specific. The aim of the study is to effect change in a particular setting; without consideration to its generalizability. If others want to consider using this research in their setting, they must carefully consider extent to which their setting is similar to the one for this study.

The fourth limitation to the study is convenience sampling. The students to whom I have access all live within a residential community and are required to take WPC 101 as part of the first-year curriculum. Thus, this group of students are not representative of all first-semester students and accordingly conclusions must be made with caution.

### **Implications for Research**

Results from this study suggest several implications for research. In this section, three implications for research are discussed. They include (a) studies of student engagement within a residential housing setting, (b) WPC 101 additional curriculum focused on engagement reflection and (c) research on self-efficacy development of students living on campus.

The first implication relates to additional studies of student engagement within a residential housing setting. In the research literature, there is a gap in how student engagement, per se, affects other outcomes such as retention and so on. Much of what has been explored with respect to housing communities has been focused on the type of living-learning community that has been implemented rather than *how* students are

engaged to become actively involved in their campus and residential community. Thus, research should move beyond exploring programmatic expectations and become more focused on creating an engagement model which centers on individual students and their experiences.

The second implication relates to the WPC 101 course. The curriculum is very rich in terms of sharing campus and college specific resources. Infusing of more reflective activities will provide students with space for intentional reflection and afford students with opportunities to form deeper connections to the course content and their personal and academic goals.

The third implication relates to research on self-efficacy development of on-campus, residential students. Thus, the question is how does self-efficacy develop as a result of living on-campus? Housing and residence life education programs have been employing intentional efforts to assist students with the development of self-efficacy through programmatic approaches. Further, how does such self-efficacy influence student achievement, engagement, and retention?

### **Implications for Practice**

Results from this action research project suggest several implications for practice. Two implications for practice are (a) creating more formal learning outcomes for engagement within the ASU Housing Residential College model, (b) creating specific sections of WPC 101 for on-campus students, and (c) fostering the development of friendships and relationships, the roots of connecting first-semester students to ASU.

The first implication directly influences implementation of the ASU Housing Residential College model. Currently, the ASU Residential College model exists to

provide a formalized partnership between academic colleges and ASU Housing to create engagement opportunities. Although there is shared sense of understanding of student engagement, the creation of better, more focused learning outcomes will assist the staff in developing stronger programs to foster engagement and creating better assessments to determine the effectiveness of those programs. The three major areas which need to be assessed within the Residential College model to create more centralized learning outcomes is (a) how students are creating relationships within the residential communities, (b) how community development initiatives are creating an environment which fosters engagement on-campus and in the community, (c) how affinity to the ASU is understood in creating programmatic endeavors. For example, involvement and engagement activation via ASU athletic sponsored events is a priority of senior leadership due to the fact students pay an athletic fee. Therefore, within our RC model the intentional focus is creating individual conversations with residents on how they can become engaged through attending ASU athletic events because of the social connection going in a large community creates an affinity to ASU and to living on-campus.

As it is currently implemented, WPC 101 assists students to build intentional connections with peers and WPC staff. Students who live on-campus have an enormous opportunity to create and cultivate unique connections to other students, staff and academic related resources. WPC 101 serves as a retention indicator of how a student is “doing” in real time. While WPC 101 students are integrated with students who do not live on-campus, specific sections for just students who live on-campus allow students to better relate to one another in a smaller shared classroom community. Integrating the programmatic and engagement related activities in the hall, WPC 101 facilitators can

focus on who to assist students with building a stronger affinity to W. P. Carey and ASU. W. P. Carey identified living on-campus as the way to become involved and engaged. By offering specific WPC 101 for on-campus students, this will allow Housing professionals and W. P. Carey staff to teach courses in which these students see a familiar person and know they can relate to them not only as a staff member but as an instructor. This allow for housing staff to add a level of professional development and deeper connection to students living within the W. P. Carey Residential College Community.

With respect to fostering the development of friendships and relationships, the roots of connecting first-semester students to ASU, several matters warrant consideration. First, it appears first-semester students are successfully developing relationships with peers. The qualitative data clearly reflect this outcome. By comparison, the relationships between first-semester students and ASU faculty and staff members appear to be quite limited. Thus, future offerings of the Engagement Workshops or other interventions might be focused on aiding students to develop these relationships. Specifically, requiring students to meet with a faculty member and with a staff member might be outcomes for WPC 101 in future offerings of the course. Although such requirements appear to be somewhat ‘forced,’ the potential benefits could be substantial.

Creating intentional pathways for connections assists students with being able to discover their interests and achieve their goals because there are intentional connection points. The more housing staff are able to further integrate into the academic affairs area of ASU, this assist with closing the divide and create a stronger partnership. The central tenet of the Residential College partnership is to develop an “ours” mentality and not silos which does not create a stronger partnerships.

## **Personal Lessons Learned**

Throughout this action research journey, I have experienced many personal lessons along the way. Three key lessons I Have learned are discussed in this section. The three lessons are (a) the power of the student narrative, (b) instruction of WPC 101-like courses, and (c) the value of incremental cycles of action research.

The most important lesson I have learned is the power of the student narrative. As a student affairs professional with 10 years of experience, I have always found value in the perspective of students. Nevertheless, because of this study, I observe with greater respect the influences of self-efficacy and behavior choices and their effects on engagement. After reading the essay reflections and coding the interviews, I conclude these students are remarkable. The importance of their individual narratives comes into sharp focus when I consider the individual interviews with students and how they share the story of their journey to ASU and what they want to accomplish while they are here. In addition to academic success, students relate how they want to start fresh and they view coming to ASU and becoming involved as the way to restart their experience. Notably, students' stories provided a powerful reminder of how much we do not know about our students until we ask them.

The second key lesson I have learned is the importance of classes like WPC 101 for first-year students. This is not my first time teaching a WPC 101 course, but with the intentional focus on the research study teaching this time around became more important. Beyond offering students the knowledge of resources, students have direct contact with a university staff member, which is critical. Sometimes, first-year ASU students get lost in the shuffle of the ASU because it is so large. Thus, it is important for students to know

they have someone who is in their corner. Our students need to know who they can succeed by seeing an example of someone who is fully supportive of their success.

The third key lesson I have learned is the value of incremental cycles of action research. The previous two cycles of action research inform the current research study and foster deeper understanding that inform this study. ASU's Ed.D program defines action research as "a form of disciplined, reflective inquiry into one's professional practice for the purpose of moving towards a principled vision, which is support in action" (Arizona State University, n.d.). In my action research journey, I have grown tremendously with the support of my committee and LSC colleagues. This process allows me to thoughtfully consider how we, in ASU Housing, create centers of engagement for our residential college students to build engagement opportunities for them.

## **Conclusions**

Why do we focus on student engagement? The answer is simple, students who are engaged in their collegiate environment will be more likely to continue in their studies and graduate. Extending Kuh's (2003; 2009) work on student engagement to first-year students to foster and develop initial stages of engagement is a worthy endeavor for the university, university housing, and academic colleges to pursue. In fact, that was the focus of this research study. Through the workshops in WPC 101, I tried to provide some structure and guidance to first-semester students to facilitate early engagement including building connections to others, using university resources, and exploring business-related, campus organizations. .

Thus, the focus is on creating an intentional path way for first-semester students to become engaged. WPC 101 aids students in becoming aware of and taking advantage of resources within an academic setting. Living on campus affords students opportunities to engage with other peers and build understandings about ASU. Notably, first-semester student engagement is not just about introducing engagement, but assisting with connecting the pieces about how engagement can beneficially influence their experiences. Taken together, these various components related to engagement add to students' rich narratives of the Sun Devil experience.



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APPENDIX A

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

## WPC 101: Student Engagement Survey

### **Unique Identifier**

For those who choose to participate, to ensure we can match your pre- and post-intervention survey responses to analyze the data, we will ask you to use a unique identifier known only to you and it will be easy to recall. This identifier consists of using the first three letters of your mother's name and the last four digits of your phone number. Thus, "Sar 4567" would be the identifier for someone whose mother's name was Sarah and whose phone number was (602) 543-4567.

Unique Identifier: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Demographic Information**

Demographic information is collected for the purposes of statistical data collection and is not factor of the research study.

Gender Identity (place an "x" in the area(s) in which you gender identify)

Male	Female	Gender Non-Conforming/Binary	Transgender Man	Transgender Woman	Prefer not to answer

Ethnic Identity (place an "x" area(s) in which you ethnic identity represents)

White or Caucasian	Black or African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian of Pacific Islander	Middle Eastern	Write In:	Prefer not to answer

Are you an instate or out-of-state student (place an "x" based on your residency classification)

Arizona Resident	Out-of-State	Non-US Resident

## Student Engagement Survey

Directions: There are seven sections to the Student Engagement Survey. Carefully read each statement and place an “x” on level of agreement for each statement. This survey should not take more than 8-10 minutes to complete. The information shared will only be with the researcher.

Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Involvement Opportunities (Engagement)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I want to be attend ASU Sporting events (football, basketball, etc.) (1)						
I attended ASU Fall Welcome Events (Spark to Service, Sun Devil Welcome, Passport, etc.) (2)						
I want to get to know the other students who live in my residence hall. (3)						
I want to a leader in my Residence Hall by joining the Residence Hall Council. (4)						
I want to get involved with ASU Student Organizations (Fraternities/Sororities, United Student Government, Programming Activities Board, etc.) (5)						
I want to attend other social events on-campus (Devilpalooza, Fall Welcome Concert, etc.) (6)						

I want to join a business student organization (Alpha Kappa Psi, Delta Sigma Pi, Business Student Council, etc.) (7)						
I want to become involved with leadership opportunities at ASU. (8)						

Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Affinity Development (Connections)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I feel connected to the ASU because of the activities in my residential college. (1)						
I am developing a stronger bond to ASU (2)						
Living on-campus is helping me develop a stronger connection to ASU (3)						
Getting to know others is						

helping me develop a connection to ASU (4)						
Attending class and academic activities help with developing a stronger bond to ASU (5)						

Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Campus Environment (Engagement)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Going to the W. P. Carey Undergraduate Programs Office (UPO) has been helpful (1)						
There are many resources to assist in my learning. (2)						
Attending student organization meetings has been interesting. (3)						
Fall Welcome Week activities created a positive atmosphere.(4)						



ASU's resources make me feel like I am supported. (5)						
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Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **ASU Community (Attitudes)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I enjoy being at ASU (1)						
I enjoy being a W. P. Carey Student (2)						
I made the right choice to attend ASU (3)						
I have the opportunity to learn from others around me by being at ASU. (4)						
I have the opportunity to connect with faculty and staff at ASU. (5)						
ASU is a great community. (6)						
To me, ASU feels like a community because I can find						

others who share similar values and beliefs. (7)						
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Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Quality of Relationships (Connections)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I am making connections with other students outside of the classroom setting (1)						
I have been able to form "friendships" with other students (2)						
I am making connections with ASU Faculty and Staff (3)						
I am making connections with student leaders in the residence halls (Community Assistant, Residential Engagement Leader, Peer Mentor, etc) (4)						
I will connect with my						

academic advisor (5)						
I plan to meet with faculty members during their offices hours (6)						

Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Self-Efficacy (Self-Efficacy)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I am able to navigate the ASU "system" (1)						
I am confident I can find my way through ASU's academic structures. (2)						
I am certain I can effectively use different resources offered at ASU (3)						
I am sure I can ask for support for academic issues. (4)						
I am certain I can overcome challenges that may arise as I go to college. (5)						
I am confident in my abilities						

to seek out campus support services when issues arise (ASU Counseling, ASU Wellness, etc.) (6)						
I am confident in my abilities to use ASU campus resources. (7)						

Please rate to the extent to which you agree with the following statements: **Returning to ASU (Intentions)**

	Strongly Agree (6)	Agree (5)	Somewhat agree (4)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I plan to reenroll at ASU for the spring 2019 semester (1)						
I am unsure if I will reenroll at ASU for the spring 2019 semester (2)						
I intend to reenroll at ASU for the spring semester 2019. (3)						

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT LETTER

Greetings WPC 101 Students!

My name is Timothy Leyson and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. Ray Buss, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on fostering student engagement in a residential college setting.

We are asking for your help, which will involve your participation in a small-scale intervention, as well as two surveys and may include an interview concerning your understanding of student engagement within a residential college setting. The intervention will take place over three course meeting times within WPC 101. The surveys and the interview are not part of the coursework assignments as participation in this research study will be voluntary. The survey will be conducted prior to the beginning of the project and at the conclusion and will take about 7-10 minutes each time, for a total of 14 to 20 minutes. The interview will occur at the end of the project and will take up to 30 minutes. I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interviews to be recorded. You also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know if you want to stop the interview at any time.

The intervention will consist of three Student Engagement Workshops, which will be integrated into the subject matter and coursework for that particular course meeting. Student Engagement Workshop #1 will focus on the personal experiences you bring to ASU and how they relate to your goals. Student Engagement Workshop #2 will focus on the goals you have set for yourself and the ways in which you want to engage in your student experience at ASU. Student Engagement Workshop #3 will focus future directions with your student engagement and involvement experiences at ASU. Please note that whether you choose or do not choose to participate in the surveys and interviews, you will receive the Workshop information as part of the course. For those who choose to participate, to ensure we can match your pre- and post-intervention survey responses to analyze the data, we will ask you to use a unique identifier known only to you and it will be easy to recall. This identifier consists of using the first three letters of your mother's name and the last four digits of your phone number. Thus, "Sar 4567" would be the identifier for someone whose mother's name was Sarah and whose phone number was (602) 543-4567.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. Your choice to participate in the surveys and interview will not affect your grade in the course or your standing at ASU. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

The benefit to participation is the opportunity for you to reflect intentionally on your ASU experience and how becoming engaged and involved will allow you to explore your own interests' and attitudes. Thus, there is potential to enhance your Sun Devil

experience and relate to other students within your residential college environment and the WPC 101 course. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be anonymous. Results from this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team – Dr. Ray Buss at ray.buss@asu.edu or (602) 543-6343 and Tim Leyson at Timothy.leyson@asu.edu and (480) 727-5019.

Thank you,

Timothy P. Leyson, Doctoral Student  
Ray Buss, Associate Professor

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Ray Buss at (602) 543-6343 or the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

## APPENDIX C

### I WOULD DO THIS ACTIVITY



Prompts for Would I do this Activity 11.30.2018

1. Joining a WPC student organization
2. Joining a club or organization at ASU
3. I know the resources available to me.
4. Living on-campus has helped me become more connected with others
5. Attend a sporting event (football, basketball, etc)
6. Get involved more with Housing (CA, REL, Community Council, etc)
7. Live on-campus again either next year or before I graduate in 2021
8. Develop a stronger bond to ASU
9. Living on-campus has helped me develop a strong bond to ASU
10. Living on-campus has helped me develop a strong bond to W. P. Carey
11. Take a class like WPC 101 again
12. Attend on-campus events (Devilpalooza, Fall Welcome Concert, etc)
13. Become involved with leadership opportunities at ASU
14. Go to a meeting with my Academic Advisor
15. Join events or organizations where I would be able to meet other people
16. Go to the tutoring center for academic assistance
17. Go to campus services when I am feeling unsure or need assistance
18. Know how to connect with campus services regarding my personal well-being
19. Have been able to navigate my way around ASU to connect with other students, faculty and staff.
20. If i had to chose, I would still attend ASU even after knowing what has happened this semester

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interview Questions for WPC101 Students—Post Intervention

1. What do you think it means to be engaged at ASU?
2. What do you enjoy about being at ASU? What do you find challenging about being at ASU?
3. (Living on-campus) Do you live on-campus? If so, where? How has living on-campus assisted you in being successful at ASU?
  - a. Has living on-campus influenced your confidence to continue at ASU?
  - b. Has living on-campus changed your attitudes about ASU?
  - c. Has living on-campus influenced your decision to remain at ASU?
4. How has participating in the Engagement Workshops helped you to become engaged at ASU?
  - a. Have they changed your thoughts about being at ASU?
  - b. Have they changed your attitudes about ASU?
  - c. Have they changed your ability to continue at ASU?
5. What has been one learning lesson you have experienced over the course of this semester?
6. What did you find interesting about the about the Engagement Workshops? One aspect you would like to change?
7. What particular workshop assignment has been the most beneficial to you?
8. How has your work in WPC101 encouraged you to become more engaged on-campus?
9. What do students need in order to be successful at ASU? Why?
10. What engagement opportunities have you taken advantage of/participated in? Why did you select those particular opportunities?
11. How have you grown in being “connected” to ASU?
12. How would you describe the campus environment? Is it helpful/supportive?
13. How would you describe the ASU community? (Tell me about your thoughts on ASU being a community.)
14. What kinds of relationships with peers, student leaders, advising and other staff, and faculty members have you developed?
15. Tell me about your thoughts on being able to succeed in college. What has helped you to feel that way?
16. Tell me about your intentions about returning for the spring semester. Will you be returning? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX E

### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW EMAIL TO STUDENTS

Hello!

I hope this email finds you well. You are receiving this email because you have chosen to be part of my research study. Thank you for being a participant in my research study through WPC 101. Your reflections and feedback have been an invaluable source for my research study. The intention of this email to invite you to the second phase my research study, individual interviews.

As a reminder, I am collecting data which focused on fostering student engagement with students who live on-campus taking WPC 101 during the Fall 2018 Semester. All of the course assignments have intentionally been focused on your individual growth as a student through the development of skills needed to become an engaged learner and succeed at ASU from your first year and beyond.

The individual interview will last no more than 25-30 minutes. I would like to audio record these interviews but will not do so without your expressed permission. Interview times have been preset for various dates and times and you can sign up for your interview time at this Doodle Link: <https://doodle.com/poll/zmx7hpsgm9xmvpvb>.

Once you click on the Doodle link (above), you will type your name and select the time and date which works best for you. I will be the only person will see your name but everyone will be able to see the times that have been selected.

If none of the dates and times work for you, I am more than happy to pick a better time which will work better for your schedule. All interviews will take place in the Hassayampa Academic Village (Mohave Hall) Building A, Room 109 (my office). If you choose to be interviewed, I will be sending a follow up message with directions.

Again, thank you for being part of my research study. I appreciate all of the time, effort and energy you have given to WPC 101 this semester!

Have a great day! #GoDevils

Best  
Tim

APPENDIX F

FINAL ENGAGEMENT REFLECTION

# Final Engagement Reflection--Fall 2018

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Name (First and Last Name)

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Q2 Student ID Number

---

Q3 Email Address

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Q11 Do you live on-campus?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q14 Are you from Arizona?

☐ Yes-I am from Arizona (1)

☐ No-I am not from Arizona (2)

Q4 What has been one lesson you have learned about yourself since starting the Fall semester?

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Q5 What engagement opportunities or experiences have you taken advantage of/participated in? Why did you select those particular opportunities or experiences?

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Q6 What do you enjoy about being at ASU? What do you find most challenging about being at ASU? Why?

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Q12 Which WPC 101 class has had the most impact on your current experience?

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Q13 Do you think you are the same person from when the Fall 2018 semester started?  
Why?

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Q7 How has WPC 101 encouraged you to become more engaged on-campus?

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Q8 Rate your intention for the Spring 2019 semester

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Do you plan on coming back next semester? (Spring 2019) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

Q9 Why are you coming back or not coming back for the Spring 2019 semester?

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End of Block: Default Question Block

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Start of Block: Block 1

Q10 Thank you for taking this Final Engagement Reflection! Your input has been extremely valuable!

End of Block: Block 1

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APPENDIX G

IWEEK REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

# iWeek Club Comparison

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use legible handwriting and/or type up your answers (which may be required by your facilitator). You should write the answers / complete the worksheet yourself. *Do NOT ask the organization representative to write the answers, he / she should ONLY sign the worksheet.*

\* Questions 4 & 5 must be written in complete sentences to receive full credit.

**iWeek is August 27-31 from 10am to 1pm on the Dean's Patio (between BA and BAC)**

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**Introduce yourself (shake hands, provide your name) to a W. P. Carey-affiliated organization at iWeek. Ask a Representative the following questions.**

1. Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
2. Meeting Date(s)/Time(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
3. Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
4. What is the purpose/mission of this student organization? (8 pts.)
5. How has this organization helped you grow personally & professionally? (8 pts.)
6. Interviewee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (3 pts.)

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**Ask a Representative of a DIFFERENT organization (no credit for duplicates) the following questions. Remember to introduce yourself to this organization.**

1. Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
2. Meeting Date(s)/Time(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
3. Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (2 pts.)
4. What is the purpose/mission of this student organization? (8 pts.)
5. How has this organization helped you grow personally & professionally? (8 pts.)
6. Interviewee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (3 pts.)

**What day(s) did you attend iWeek (please circle)?**

Mon. 8/27

Tues. 8/28

Wed. 8/29

Thurs. 8/30

Fri. 8/31

# iWeek Club Comparison Reflection Essay

## Essential Content and Formatting Requirements

You must format your response in essay format (multiple paragraphs, with a narrative-type flow). Do not simply copy the questions and write short answers. Your essay will be between 1-3 pages in length

- Use a 12 point, professional font (Calibri, Garamond, etc.) with 1” margins all around.
- Make sure to include a heading with your full name, class section, and facilitator’s name.
- Your response should be between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages in length.

As part of the iWeek Club comparison assignment, you will asked to reflect on how becoming involved will assist you in your time ASU. In your essay, please answer the following questions.

- What does being an engaged student mean to you?
- How have the goals you set for yourself in your *My Sun Devil* essay assignment influence your ability to become involved in clubs and organizations at ASU?
- List 3-5 ways you want to get involved at ASU and explain why you want choose these ways of involvement
- How will becoming involved in clubs and organizations at ASU make a stronger student?
- What strengths do you bring to the organizations you spoke with during *iWeek*?
- How and why did you choose the organizations you spoke with during *iWeek*?
- Which organizations do you feel most drawn to and why?
- What do you benefit from becoming involved at ASU?
- How has living on-campus assisted you with becoming involved?
- Thinking about your semester, does becoming involved in clubs and organizations assist you with ensuring you made the right choice to attend ASU?

APPENDIX H

MY SUN DEVIL STORY ASSIGNMENT

## My Sun Devil Story Essay

Part of your experience as a freshman is to explore all of the opportunities that lie ahead of you. As an ASU freshman, you are faced with many questions: What do you want to do while you are at ASU? What career do you want to pursue when you graduate? What do you ultimately want to do with your life?

These are great questions, but coming up with answers might be a bit overwhelming, especially when you've just recently made the transition to college. Some answers may stay the same and some may change over time. Right now, just try to come up with the best answers you can, as a starting point.

**First, think about why you chose Arizona State University and the W. P. Carey School of Business. Then, tell your “Sun Devil Story” by answering at least five**

**(5) of the following topics:**

1. **YOUR BACKGROUND** – Where is your hometown? –or– Where do you call “home”? How does your background by race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and/or family circumstance contribute to who you are?
2. **WHY ASU** – Why have you decided to go to college? Why did you choose to attend Arizona State University or the W. P. Carey School of Business, specifically? What is your major and why did you choose it?
3. **WHY BUSINESS** – Why did you select a business major? What are your current impressions of business as a career and industry?
4. **YOUR GOALS** – What do you want to learn about at college and in your business degree? Are there any specific skills that you want to improve?
5. **YOUR STRENGTHS** – What are you good at? What have people told you that you are good at? What are you most proud of?
6. **YOUR PASSIONS** – What is most important to you? What motivates you? What are you passionate about?
7. **YOUR DREAMS** – What is one thing that you want to do or achieve in your lifetime? (This doesn't have to be related to your professional career, but it can be.) What ambitions do you have for yourself personally and professionally?
8. **YOUR CAREER** – What type of work do you see yourself doing in the future? Do you have a particular job, career path, or industry in mind? What does it look like?

**If you are repeating WPC 101, please answer these additional questions at the end of your reflection:**

- Why were you not successful with WPC 101 the first time?
- What do you plan to do differently to succeed in WPC 101 this semester?
- What challenges are you still facing as an ASU and/or W. P. Carey student?

## **ESSENTIAL CONTENT & FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS**

- You must format your response in essay format (multiple paragraphs, with a narrative-type flow). Do not simply copy the questions and write short answers.
- Use a 12 point, professional font (Calibri, Garamond, etc.) with 1” margins all around.
- Make sure to include a heading with your full name, class section, and facilitator’s name.
- Your response should be between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages in length